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ARGOSY



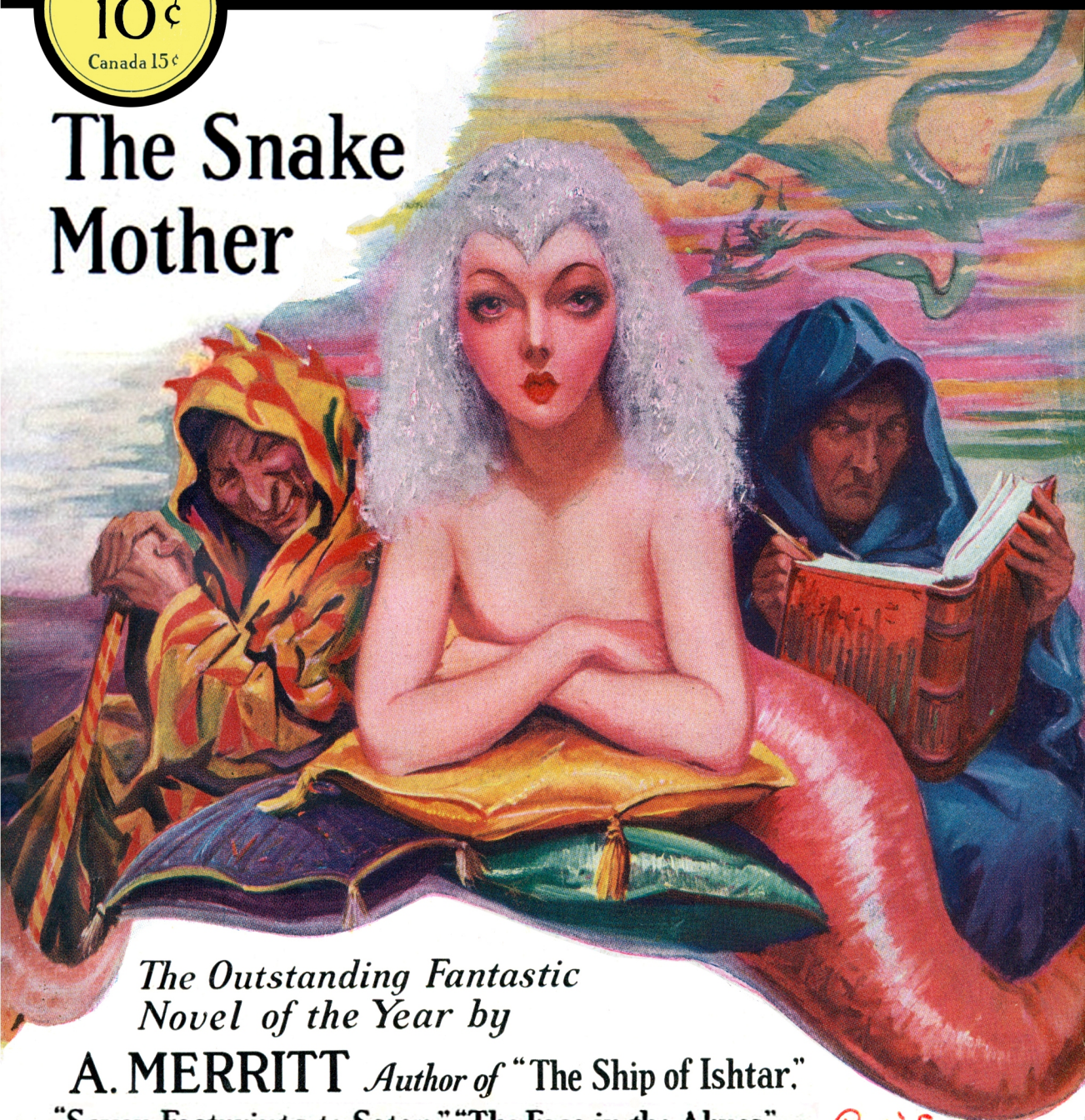
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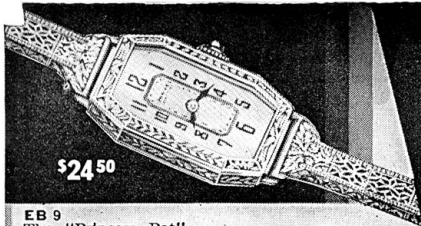
The Snake Mother



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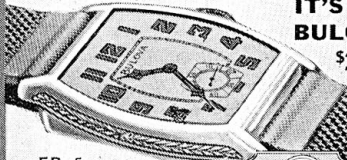
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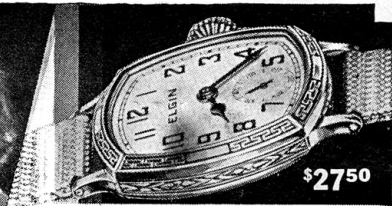
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ARGOSY



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VOLUME 216

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, New York

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President

C. T. DIXON, Vice President

MESSAGERIES HACHETTE

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,

8, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4

111 Rue Réaumur

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ARGOSY

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VOLUME 216

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1930

NUMBER 2



*Her purple eyes probed
strangely into his*

The Snake Mother

*No man had penetrated that secret forbidden valley in the Andes, and lived—
yet Nicholas Graydon was drawn there by a lure stronger
than the horror of the supernatural Unknown*

By A. MERRITT

Author of "The Ship of Ishtar," "Seven Footprints to Satan," etc.

PROLOGUE

IT is six years since I nursed Nicholas Graydon back to life in the little Andean village of Chupan from which, weeks later, I watched him set forth to find again the path to the haunted wilderness of the Cordillera de Carabaya, where death in strangest

guise had nearly overtaken him. In all those years, hardly a day had passed without some memory of him springing up.

It was as though Graydon were bent upon not letting me forget him; as though from wherever he might be he shot forth continually a spark of thought that unerringly found my

mind, commanded remembrance, and forged each day a new link in some finely drawn-out chain that joined us. I waited, always expectant, for a more definite summoning.

Then events occurred which, beside the world-wide regret they aroused, set up in that section of my brain peculiarly devoted to Graydon, a restlessness growing nigh unbearable.

It will be recalled that early last year the newspapers carried brief accounts of the flight of the Spanish aviator Pedro Narillo from Lima, in Peru, to Cuzco. A straight line between the two places is only about three hundred and fifty miles, but the Andes thrust themselves up twenty thousand feet along the route. Still, it is not much of a flight as flights go to-day. Narillo passed over Cuzco on the wings of a northwest gale. His engines were heard, his lights were seen. The newspapers carried much longer accounts when day after day went by and he was not heard from. All they could say was—he had not been heard from. Nor was he again, ever.

A month later the Englishman, Charteris, with his mechanic, soared out of Lima. He was bound on a more ambitious journey, hopping over to Sucre in Bolivia—Choquisaca, as the old Indian name goes. He never landed at Sucre. He landed somewhere, certainly. Wherever it was, neither Charteris nor his mechanic came back from it.

I had read of Narillo's flight and his vanishment idly, incuriously. That of Charteris seemed to tug at reluctant memories, without awakening them.

Next came the aerial expedition of which J. Kenton Walters, almost as well known in the United States as Lindbergh, was the chief. He flew in a four-seated all-metal Ford plane. With

him were Professor James Theron, of the Smithsonian Institution's Ethnological Department, Henry K. Timmerman, the adventurous oil millionaire who had financed the trip, and Walters's mechanic-assistant. Their plan was to loop it from New York by way of Colon, Lima and Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Colon again, Havana and New York.

A gigantic swing. They made it as far as Lima. They left Lima.

After that—silence.

IT was not until the Walters disappearance that I realized a curious fact. This was that each of the three expeditions had the Cordillera de Carabaya on its route. At least, two of them had. Charteris and Walters must cross it to reach their destination. Narillo probably had been blown over it by the tempest.

The Walters disappearance made a great stir, naturally, considering the eminence and wealth of the members of the party. At the request of Washington, Peru sent out a squadron of six planes to search for it. Bolivia sent from La Paz a squadron of five on the same errand. And those eleven planes vanished as utterly as the others! Not one of them returned to report.

It was mid-January when I read about the vanished squadrons. I lay long awake that night, thinking over the chain of disappearances which in some fashion seemed to be linked to the haunted Cordillera. And suddenly the thought came to me that I must go back to Peru—and at the same time I was aware of a stubborn subconscious resistance against the impulse.

I tossed about on my bed for hours, fighting the growing urge to return. I realized, vaguely, that the pull was in some way connected with the lost

planes. But what had I to do with them? And what could my going back to the Andean highlands accomplish for them?

At last I managed to get to sleep. That sleep was disturbed by a singularly vivid dream. I thought that I had been awakened by the sound of a golden bell tolling a note of extraordinary sweetness. I raised myself upon my elbow, and looked about my room. There was a curious flickering reflection on the south wall—at least I supposed it to be a reflection. It sharpened into a small luminous ring. This abruptly expanded from ceiling to floor. Within it was something like a luminous circular curtain. This curtain quivered and dissolved.

I seemed to be looking straight into the room of the little *posada*, the inn at Chupan where I had nursed Graydon back to life. There it was, apparently as solid and real as though it had been plucked up from the Andes and set against the side of my apartment with the intervening walls melted away. It was as plain as that.

The door of the *posada* room opened. Graydon came through it!

He walked to where my wall should have been, and stood grinning at me as though enjoying my amazement. He waved a hand to me. I heard his voice; it was at one and the same time within the room and distances upon unknown distances outside of it.

"Greetings, old man," he said, "I wish you could see your face! Well, I suppose I'd be startled myself if I were you."

I seemed to lie there, gaping at him.

"You're looking very fit, though," he went on. "Good thing, for I'm inviting you on a long trip."

"Down to your damned Carabaya to shake hands with your dinosaurs, I

suppose? No, thanks!" I thought that I replied; and made a determined effort to awaken.

"You think this is a dream?" he said. "Well, in a way it is—and in another way it isn't! And I certainly don't want you to come to the Carabaya. I *do* want you to promise to start as quick as you can, travel as fast as you can, and meet me at the *posada* down here in Chupan as soon as you can."

"Anything to do with those disappearing airplanes?" I thought I asked.

"Everything!" he answered. "I don't want any more slaughter. But there are much worse possibilities. Please come."

Despite his apparent calm, I read desperate urgency in his appeal. My opposition melted away.

"All right," I said. "I'll come. I'll probably curse myself for all kinds of a fool when I wake up. But I'll come."

His lips opened, to speak I thought—but instead of speech, out of them came the appalling howl of a siren!

I sat bolt upright in my bed. The room was in pitch darkness. The wail of the siren still filled it, fading away as the fire engine which blew it rushed into the distance. I was muttering, "It's all right, Graydon. I'll come—sure, I'll come—"

I LEAPED out of bed and turned on the electrics; went over to the south wall and felt of it. It was, of course, perfectly solid. I went to the window and looked out over the roofs of New York. They were real enough, too.

I wrestled with myself for hours. Even as I had predicted, however, the dawn found me calling myself all kinds of a fool, pretty well packed and ready for the journey; and before noon I was on a train to New Orleans.

Having settled myself comfortably for the tiresome journey, my mind went back to that little village, high on the eastern slopes of the Andes, where I had first set eyes upon Nicholas Graydon.

I had then been collecting ancient textiles for the Museum of the American Indian Heye Foundation, in New York, and was on the last leg of my tour. I had stopped at Chupan for supplies. At once, the keeper of the *posada* had told me of another Americano who was ill there, an Americano who had come from that accursed place of devils, the Cordillera de Carabaya; and so dreadful were his ravings that, in truth, at least one of the devils must have entered him. How dreadful they were I would realize when they made even the good priest, who was under the direct protection of God, hesitate to approach him!

I took charge of the sick man. Papers on him showed him to be Nicholas Graydon, a mining engineer, graduate of the Harvard School of Mines, his birthplace Philadelphia. He was about thirty, I judged, tall and rangy, his scrub of beard not hiding the clean cut, half Indian aquilinity that is the mark of the modern college-bred American.

My first shock of surprise came when I examined his wound. It seemed to me more like the stab of some immense bird's beak than the work of arrow or spear. It was a puncture clear through the muscles of the back, left shoulder and base of the neck. It had missed the arteries of the neck by the narrowest of margins.

After I had dressed it I went through the saddle bags. Among the duffel were two parcels, each wrapped with greatest care. Opening the first, I found a long black feather, oddly marked with white. Its shaft was in-

laid with little bands of gold, a curiously delicate bit of work.

But the contents of the second package brought me up on my feet. It was a golden bracelet, clearly exceedingly ancient, the band an inch wide, expanding into an oval disk some three by two inches. This disk held in high relief the most extraordinary carving I had ever seen. It showed four monsters holding up, on lifted fore legs, a bowl in which lay coiled a serpent with a woman's face and woman's breasts. Its eyes were two jewels, of a curiously luminous purple—like deepest amethysts blended with black rubies.

The four monsters were dinosaurs! The gigantic saurians that were the dominant life of earth millions of years before man appeared; that, if science is right, had been extinct for at least another million before man developed to the point of using fire.

Therein lay the full measure of my wonder. For this carving was certainly the work of human hands, and the five figures were quite as certainly portraits!

As every one knows, there are certain pictures and sculptures which carry to their beholders conviction that they are accurate copies of something actually seen by those who made them. These did just that, and overwhelmingly so.

The Snake Woman's tiny face, with all its unhuman wisdom and weirdness, was a portrait. I knew that somewhere, some time, there had been such a creature, and that the eyes of the maker of the bracelet had looked upon her. There could be no doubt about that.

So, too, it was of the dinosaurs. There had been living models. The marvelous scientific reproductions of Knight in the Field Museum of Chicago were crude compared to the im-

pression of photographic accuracy the ancient goldsmith had wrought.

It was six weeks before Graydon was able to tell me of that well-nigh incredible adventure of his in the Cordillera de Carabaya, stitching together and giving coherence to the things I had heard him rave about in his delirium. Things so utterly strange that I knew not even his fevered brain could have invented them. And which had so aroused my wonder and my curiosity that I could not have abandoned him, even had I so desired, until death had ended his speaking or life returned in full strength to make them plain to me.

CHAPTER I.

GRAYDON'S STORY.

IN Quito, he said, he had met three West Coast adventurers—Sterritt, a hard-drinking, giant Englishman with none too good a reputation, an American named Soames, and Dancre, a Frenchman. They had persuaded him to join them on a hunt for the lost treasure of the Inca Atahualpa, the ransom which was to deliver him from Pizarro but which never reached the rapacious hands of the Spaniards. This because its guardians, learning of Atahualpa's murder while conveying it, had turned back and buried it somewhere in the wilderness.

There was no doubt that there had been such a treasure. It had taken three hundred llamas to carry, legend said, the gold and jewels that made it up. Nor had it ever been found.

It was a will-o'-the-wisp, Graydon knew, that for scores of years had lured men to black despair, ruin, torment and death. So at first he had laughed at Sterritt.

But in the end he had been con-

vinced; convinced at least that there was something more tangible than usual in the story, something that might be worth looking into. Graydon was at a loose end; he could well afford the cost of a holiday. Certainly there would be adventure, even if they found no treasure.

Sterritt had got hold of an ancient parchment on which was an alleged map of the trail taken by the treasure hiders, and carefully drawn signs which purported to be copies of those cut along that trail by them. Graydon greatly doubted that they were anything of the sort, but there was no manner of doubt as to the antiquity of the document itself.

To his real amazement, they did begin to find signs cut in the rocks exactly as the parchment promised. Steadily these led them into the uncharted Andean wilderness.

At last their bearers began to murmur. They were approaching the Cordillera de Carabaya, they said, an accursed region where only demons dwelt. Threats and promises made them go on for a day or two.

The four of them awoke one morning to find their *arrieros* missing; and the muleteers had taken with them most of the burros and the supplies. Nevertheless they pushed along, still led by the signs. Suddenly these failed. They found themselves in a silent country devoid apparently even of bird and animal life. One night they pitched their camp in a clump of immense *algarroba* trees standing upon a high mound overlooking a parklike plain. To the south and not many miles away towered the precipitous scarps of snow-topped mountains.

Graydon, Dancre and Soames had set out next morning to hunt for the lost signs, leaving Sterritt in the camp.

The situation was not a comfortable one for Graydon. That day, the day of the coming of Suarra, he had written in his diary:

Two weeks since the *arrieros* deserted, and we seem to be pretty thoroughly lost. Effect upon the three is curious. Sterritt manages to keep himself evenly drunk all the time. That spare burro of his must be loaded with nothing but Quicha hell-brew. Dancre is moody and sullen. Soames seems to have developed a morbid suspicion of all of us. All three seem to hold me in some way responsible for the disappearance of the guiding signs. In Quito none of the three was half bad. But now—well, the luckiest thing for me will be for us to find no treasure. If we do, my throat will probably be the first to be cut.

Graydon, coming back to camp, heard a girl scream. He ran up the mound, through the oddly parklike grove. He had warned Sterritt to be more than careful of his treatment of any Indian women they might meet. What was the drunken fool doing? He caught a glimpse of him holding a struggling girl in his arms. He broke Sterritt's grip upon her. The Englishman reached for his pistol. Graydon's fist caught him on the point of the jaw, knocking him out.

He turned to reassure the Indian girl.

There was no Indian girl! He saw—Suarra!

GRAYDON forgot the brute at his feet, the others, his quest, forgot all—drinking in her loveliness. Her great black eyes, Egyptian in the wide midnight of their irises, regarded him, curiously. Her skin gleamed like translucent ivory through the rents that Sterritt's hands had made in the

soft amber fabric, like thick silk, which swathed her.

She spoke to him, in the Aymara tongue—yet Graydon knew that she was no Aymara, no Indian, no woman of any tribe or race he had ever seen. Her voice was low and sweet, bird-sweet, with a chime as of little silver bells running through it.

"How you slipped by the Watchers I do not understand," she said. "Nor how you could come so far within this forbidden land. Tell me"—her voice was imperious—"why came you here at all?"

Briefly, he told her. It never occurred to him to lie to her. She nodded.

"Atahualpa?" she said. "Yes, his people did come here. We took them—and their treasure. The treasure was nothing to us! In Yu-Atlanchi it was but a grain of sand among many. But Atahualpa's people were welcome—since we needed new folk to care for the Xinli and for other things, and the Snake Mother ordered it."

"The Snake Mother!" he exclaimed.

She touched a bracelet upon her arm, the bracelet I have described. And, for the first time, Graydon saw that strange being in whose tiny hands lay his destiny.

Sterritt stirred, and groaned. Consciousness was returning to him. And Soames and Dancre might be back at any minute. They must not find this girl there.

"Go," he told her. "Go quickly. There is danger for you here."

"Ah," she answered tranquilly, "but I am—Death."

A chill passed through Graydon. Suddenly, he realized the unfamiliar, the alien, beauty of her. Was there truth after all in those legends of the haunted Cordillera? He had never

doubted that there was some sound reason behind the terror of the Indians, the desertion of the *arrieros*. Was she one of its spirits, its—demons? Then reason returned to him. He laughed. She frowned at his laughter.

"Do not laugh!" she said. "The death I mean is not such as you, who live behind the high rim of our land, know. Yet since you came to my aid—I would not have this death come to you. Listen! Abandon these men! Go from here! Now! I promise you safe conduct out of this place—if you go at once."

He shook his head, ruefully.

"I can't," he said, simply.

She pointed to a tree behind her. Against its trunk leaned three slender shining spears. Their shafts were of gold, the heads of two of them of fine opal, the head of the third a flawless emerald all of six inches long, a priceless gem.

"Sometimes we hunt here with the Xinli," she told him, "and with—" she hesitated, glancing at him oddly, nor did she finish that sentence, but went on swiftly: "So it was that he who lies there caught me. I was hunting. I had slipped away from my—my followers," again she hesitated, as oddly as before, "for sometimes I like to hunt alone—wander alone. I came through these trees and saw your lodge. I came face to face with him. And I was amazed—too amazed to strike. And before I could conquer my amaze, he had seized me. And then you came. Wait—"

She stripped the bracelets from her arms, and held them out to him.

"You came for treasure," she said.

"Take these and the spears—and go!"

Again smiling, he shook his head.

He heard the sound of a horn blown by some elf, far away and high in air

it seemed. It was answered by others closer; mellow, questing notes—yet with a weird beat in them that checked the pulse of Graydon's heart. He thought he heard the beating of many wings—

"Too late!" whispered Suarra. "My followers! Light your fire to-night. Do not wander beyond these trees. You—I will save if I can!"

The mellow horns sounded closer. The girl darted through the *algarrobas*. He heard her voice in one ringing, summoning cry; a louder, closer, tumult of the elfin horns; another tumult of wings, beating the air. Silence!

So Graydon first met Suarra.

SHE came back to him a little after the dawn. The night had been one long ordeal. Dancre and Soames had returned; Sterritt had told them of the girl, of the treasure she had carried, and of Graydon's connivance at her escape. They had bound him, had beaten and choked him, had threatened him with death.

And now, with the gold lust hot in the hearts of the three, here she was—carrying with her that which could only fan that lust to hotter flame!

A cloak of green swathed her. In her misty hair gleamed a coronal of emeralds set in red gold; bracelets of gold studded with the same gems circled her wrists and ankles. Behind her paced a white llama, harnessed with gold and ropes of jewels, golden panniers at its sides.

Graydon had warned her of these men. Why, then, had she returned decked with a queen's ransom? Almost, it seemed to him, she had come so deliberately; that she was bent on arousing to the full the very passions from which she had most to fear!

Why?

And she had brought no followers. With her were only two hooded figures, one draped in blue carrying an ebon staff; the other in red and yellow with staff of vermillion. The first stalked along somberly; the second with mincing little backward and forward steps that carried the grotesque suggestion that its robes covered not a man but some huge bird. No protection these for her against the three, burning now with avarice!

"Suarra!" Graydon cried despairingly. "Why did you return?"

For answer she leaned over him and cut his bonds. And then, her two hooded and cloaked followers standing, silent, she made her bargain with the three, promising to lead them to a place where gems like those in her hair grew "like flowers in a garden," and gold "came streaming forth like water."

"You may bathe in it," she had told them. "Drink from it if you will. Carry away all that you can bear. And if it causes you too much sorrow to leave it, you may stay with it forever; nay, become a part of it even! Men of gold! Yea, golden men!"

And she had laughed; the figure in red and yellow whom Graydon was to know later as the Lord of Fools, had shaken his staff, and fluttered like a great parrot; but the blue-clad figure whom he was to know as the Lord of Fate stood immobile, something definitely terrifying in his aloofness.

From over Suarra's head had come a muted chorus of the faëry horns, and a rustling of unseen wings.

She had unpacked the panniers, setting before them cups of gold and deep boat-shaped golden dishes, and tall ewers whose handles were slender carved winged serpents wrought in

lacquers of emeralds and rubies; she had given them food and poured them wine. After they had eaten, they had set out for that treasure she had promised them, Graydon oppressed by forebodings, the others watchful, suspicious, yet driven onward by their greed as irresistibly as ever Orestes by the Furies.

They had traveled along a high ledge that ridged a flat and oval plain strewn with immense, isolated rocks rising from it like menhirs of the Druids. Straight across that plain, five miles away, were the smooth scarps of a gigantic mountain, its perpendicular precipices rising twenty thousand feet or more in air. These cliffs formed the arc of a vast circle.

Behind them, Graydon knew, lay hidden that place of mystery she had called Yu-Atlanchi!

IT was over this plain that the Scarlet Weaver, the spider man had scuttled. After it, the hissing pack of green-and-blue-scaled monsters Suarra had called the Xinli, dinosaurs dwarfed to the size of Great Danes. He had watched them urged on by that golden-haired, cruel-eyed rider she had named, with cold hatred in her own eyes, Lantlu. There he had seen the Scarlet Weaver, scrambling up the edge of the bowl to the ledge on which they were hid, fall back into the jaws of the pack, paralyzed by the black staff of the Lord of Fate.

While they had passed on unseen, by luck—or by sorcery!

She had told him, as they went, a little of her strange race.

"I am weary of Yu-Atlanchi," she had said, somberly. "Yes, weary of its ancient wisdom, and of its treasures, and its deathless people! I would go into the new world, where there are

babes, and many of them, and the laughter of children, and life streams swiftly, passionately—even though it is through the opened doors of Death that it flows. In Yu-Atlanchi the doors of both Life and Death are closed except to those who choose to open them. And life is a still stream. And there are few babes, and of the laughter of children—little.”

“What are your people, Suarra?” he asked.

“The ancient people,” she told him. “The most ancient. Ages upon ages ago they came down from the north where they had dwelt for other ages still. They were driven away by the great cold. One day the earth rocked and swung. It was then the great cold came, and the darkness and icy tempests, and even the warm seas began to freeze. Their cities, so the legends run, are hidden now under mountains of ice. They journeyed south in their ships, bearing with them the serpent-people who had taught them most of their wisdom—and the Snake Mother is the last daughter of that people!

“They came to rest here. At that time the sea was close and the mountains had not yet been born. They found hordes of the Xinli. They were larger, far larger than now. My people destroyed most of them, and tamed and bred those they spared to their uses. And here for another age they dwelt, as they had in the north.

“Then there were great earth shakings and the mountains began to lift. Although all their wisdom was not great enough to keep the mountains from being born, it could control their growth around their ancient city. Slowly, steadily through another age the mountains rose. Until at last they girdled Yu-Atlanchi like a vast wall—a wall which could not be scaled. Nor

did my people care; indeed, it gladdened them, since by then they had closed the Door of Death and cared no more to go into the outer world. And so they have dwelt for other ages more.”

“If your people were so wise,” he had said, “why did they not come forth and rule this world?”

“But why should they have?” she asked in turn. “They have nothing more to learn! If they had come forth, what could they have done but shape the rest of earth into likeness of that part in which they dwelt? What use in that, Graydon? None!

“And many let the years stream by while they dream. For dream they also have conquered. Through dream they create their own worlds; do therein as they will; live life upon life as they will it. Why should they go out into the one world when they can create myriads of their own at will?”

They had come at last to that vast cavern which was the home of the Face. Over its threshold they had been led—and left.

THAT cavern, Graydon had said, was like a gigantic hollow globe of black rock which had been cut in two, and one-half cast away. Glittering rays, tempests of luminous atoms, streamed out of its curving walls, polished like mirrors. On those walls, hanging like grapes, grew clustered gems.

Rubies glowing with every rubrous tint, from that clear scarlet which is like sunlight streaming through the fingers of delicate maids, to deepest sullen reds of bruised hearts; sapphires that shone with blues as rare as those under the bluebird’s wings, and blues as deep as those which darken beneath the creamy crest of the Gulf Stream’s crisping waves; huge emeralds with the

peacock verdancies of tropic shallows and the deep green of jungle glades; diamonds glittering with irised fires; great burning opals; flaming unknown jewels.

From where they stood, a flight of Cyclopean steps ran down a hundred feet or more into the heart of the cavern. At the left of this was the semi-globe of the wall.

At its right was an abyss which fell sheer away into bottomless depth upon depth.

Before them was—the Face!

Bodiless, its chin rested upon the floor of the cavern a little beyond the lowest step. Its eyes of pale blue crystals were level with their own. The Face was carved out of the same black rock, but within it was no faintest sparkle of the streaming luminescence, the storm of firefly atoms.

It was Luciferean, arrogant and ruthless. Upon its broad brows power was throned, an evil and imperious power. And those pale blue eyes were alive—No! The eyes were not alive, but behind them *something* was alive, something tremendously alive—and as tremendously evil. Something caged! Some evil prisoned thing, that peered through the eyes of jewel as though they were windows!

Now he saw that all the darting rays, all the flashing atoms, were concentrated upon that Face, and that there was a great circlet of gold over its brow, like a crown. From that crown, like drops of yellow sweat, globules of gold dripped. They crept sluggishly down its cheeks. From the eyes dropped other golden drops—like tears. And out of each corner of the drooping mouth the golden globules rolled like spittle. Golden sweat, golden tears and golden slaver crawled and joined a rivulet of gold that oozed out from be-

hind the Face, thence to the verge of the abyss and over its lip.

“Look into my eyes! Look into my eyes!”

It seemed to Graydon that the Face had spoken, imperiously, not to be disobeyed. He looked into its eyes. From them there poured into him visions of what gold, gold without end, could do for him. The eyes promised him power over men and nations, power unlimited and ruthless. They poured a fire into his blood, a Satanic ecstasy, a flaming recklessness.

He tensed himself to leap down the steps, straight to that gigantic mask of black rock that sweated, wept and slavered gold, to take from it what it offered—to pay it whatever it should demand of him in return—

He was thrust aside; he reeled, and caught himself on the very edge of the stairway. Past him rushed the three—gaunt Soames, giant Sterritt, Dancre.

By God, they couldn't get away with that!

Earth and the dominion of earth were his own for the taking. The Face had promised them to him first!

He leaped after them.

Something caught his ankles, pinioned them, wrapped itself around his knees, brought him to an abrupt halt. Raging, cursing, he looked down. He was in the coils of a white serpent. It bound him tightly like a rope, its head was level with his heart. The white serpent's head swayed, then turned, its gaze fastened upon something beyond him. Graydon's gaze followed it.

He saw—the Snake Mother!

HER shimmering length half-coiled, she lay within the radiant air directly between him and the Face. He saw her, and yet plainly through her he could see the weird cavern and

all that it held. Her purple eyes were intent upon his.

And instantly rage and all that fiery poison of golden lust that had poured into him vanished. He stared fearlessly into the eyes of the Face. Their spell upon him was broken.

He looked down the stairway. The three were at its end. They began to climb the cliffed chin of the Face. And now they were in the full focus of the driving rays. For a moment they stood out like three men cut from cardboard a little darker than the black stone. Then they grayed, their outlines grew misty. They ceased their climbing. They writhed as though in some intolerable agony—

They faded out!

Where they had been there hovered for a breath something like three wisps of stained cloud. The wisps dissolved.

In their place were three great drops of gold. Sluggishly the three globules began to roll down the Face. They became one. It dripped slowly down to the crawling golden stream, was merged into it, and was carried to the lip of the abyss—

And over it!

From high over the gulf came a burst of the elfin horns. And Graydon saw at last what it was that sent forth those strange notes. Their bodies were serpents, silver-scaled. But they were winged. They dipped and drifted and eddied on snowy, long feathered wings like the plumage of ghostly birds of paradise.

Large and small, some of the size of the great python and some no longer than the asp, they writhed and coiled and spun through the sparkling air, trumpeting, calling to each other with their voices like elfin horns; fencing joyously with each other with bills that were like thin, straight swords.

Winged serpents, paradise-plumed, whose bills were sharp rapiers. Winged serpents sending forth their pæans of faëry trumpets while that crawling golden stream of which Soames, Dancre and Sterritt were now a part dripped slowly down into the unfathomable void!

Graydon dropped upon the step, consciousness suddenly blotted out.

When his senses returned, he was in a forest. Beside him his burro nibbled the grass.

"Suarra! Beloved!" he whispered—and then loudly, a panic of loneliness sweeping him—"Suarra!"

A figure stirred in the shadow. It was an Indian of a type familiar to him, tall with clean-cut features, in corselet and kilt of padded blue silk. He handed Graydon a package wrapped also in silk. He opened it. Within it was Suarra's bracelet of the Snake Mother and the *caraquenne* feather she had worn when first he saw her.

Graydon restored the feather to its coverings, and thrust it into the pocket over his heart. The bracelet—and why he did it he did not know—he slipped over his own wrist. All that day they traveled, and most of the next. Then the Indian told him that he must go on alone.

They stood upon the edge of a cliff some two hundred feet high. Graydon saw at its base a faintly marked trail. There was a fairly easy descent to it, zigzagging down. The Indian pointed the way he must take.

With his burro he climbed down the slope. The Indian stood watching him. As Graydon reached a turn in that trail, he waved his hand in farewell, and slipped back into the forest. Graydon plodded on for about a mile. Then he turned back, retraced his way

to the cliff and, driving his burro ahead of him, reclinced it.

He slipped over the edge of the hill and stood there listening. He heard nothing. He pushed ahead of the burro and strode forward.

Instantly, close above his head, he heard an angry bugle note, and with it a whirring of great wings. Instinctively, he threw up an arm. By chance it was the one on which he had placed Suarra's bracelet. The purple stones flashed in the sun. Graydon heard the bugling again—startled, protesting.

There was a whistling flurry close beside him, as of some invisible, winged creature striving to check its flight. He felt a sharp blow against his shoulder, a searing pang. The blood gushed from his shoulder and neck. He fell, rolling over the crest of the hill and down its side.

When he recovered his senses it was to find the burro standing over him at the foot of the scarp. He was badly wounded, that he knew.

And he knew, too, that what had wounded him was one of the feathered serpents of the abyss!

One of those Watchers, whose vigilance by some strange chance he and the three who now were slowly dribbling down the abyss had evaded when they had crossed the frontier into the forbidden land. And finally he knew it was useless, wounded as he was, to try to go on. That night the fever took him. The next day he met some friendly Indians. With their aid he managed to make Chupan, on the last reserves of his strength.

A PLEASANT prospect for me, and without the expectation of a Suarra to spur me on! Nevertheless, at New Orleans, with seconds to spare, I made the fast boat to Colon.

Less than two days after that I was taking the thirty-five minute flight across the Isthmus of Panama. And four days later I was in Lima. Which, I reflected, was pretty quick work; and if Graydon had any means of keeping check on my movements, ought to satisfy him, no matter how pressing the emergency that had made him call upon me—if he really had—in such unusual fashion.

At Lima I had no difficulty in getting a plane to take me to Cuzco. I could save about five days by landing there instead of proceeding to Chupan direct from Lima. It was a strong little two-seated Spad. We took off at seven that morning. With any kind of luck we should land at Cuzco about two that afternoon. A most engaging little chap, one Pedro de Aguielles, was the Spad's owner and pilot.

We had flown about two hundred miles when the storm struck us. There had been no warning whatever. At the touch of the first gust the air around us thickened and grew dense with mist. De Aguielles tried to drive the plane up, but the gale had us and drove us forward. I have a vague recollection of an inferno of wind that twirled and tossed, pitched and swirled us and hurtled us on for hours.

And then the tempest began to subside. The pilot looked back and nodded at me reassuringly. We shot out of the mists into a calm and sunlit space. Giddily, I looked over the side. We were flying low, not more than five hundred feet above a broad expanse of park-like territory that might have been some vast and ordered estate in Westchester or Long Island. A few miles ahead of us loomed the scarps of a mighty mountain range. It was curiously regular—like the arc of an immense circle. Like—what was it like?

Recognition struck me with the force of an actual blow! What we were flying over was the outskirts of the hidden city, the forbidden land! We had crossed its frontiers masked in the veils of the storm . . .

Like those others who had vanished?

Before I could coördinate my thoughts I heard far ahead of us a fan-faronade of hunting horns. The chorus spiraled, and suddenly was all about us. I saw the fuselage of our plane ripped as though by a score of swords—saw de Aguilles rise in his seat, twist toward me—and then sink back with blood spurting from throat and breast!

I knew, ah, indeed but I knew, what it was that had wrecked the plane and slain him! The Watchers, the rapier beaked and invisible winged serpents of Graydon's tale! And as the Spad hurtled crazily downward, I threw myself forward under the protection of De Aguilles's body, now hanging limp.

I felt a pang like the thrust of a knife through my right shoulder. And then the plane settled into a tail spin, recovered and turned over. After that I was aware of nothing whatever.

When I opened my eyes, I was looking into a face that seemed extraordinarily familiar. Somewhere I had known some one like that!

"Graydon!" I cried, and tried to rise.

"Steady, old man!" said Graydon. "Now why in the world didn't you meet me at Chupan as I told you? Instead of taking that damned airplane? I never thought you'd do that."

I tried to answer, and fainted again. When I came to myself, there was a girl sitting beside me. Her cool hands were on my temples, and she was singing softly some queer little soothing song.

It was Suarra!

After I had looked at her a long, long time from under craftily half-closed lids, I wondered no more why Graydon had dared dinosaurs and far worse things to return to her.

This story that follows is Graydon's. It holds his reasons for summoning me. I have constructed it from what he told me, putting much of it, for the better understanding, into our own idioms.*

Much of it I wrote during my recovery, in my tent on the border of the Forbidden Land, knowing why they would not let me advance further into it; set it down often during the long nights, while outside the tent I heard, high overhead, the elfin horns of the winged Watchers, guarding me.

CHAPTER II.

RAMPARTS OF YU-ATLANCHI.

GRAYDON trudged along the scarcely discernible trail, the burro plodding along placidly before him. Almost two weeks had passed since he had left Chupan, his wound healed. Could it have taken him as long as that, he wondered, to reach the *posada* after the winged serpent had pierced him? It might have; might have taken even longer. How could he

*Author's Note: The custom of translating the speech of an archaic or unknown people into stilted phrasology has never appealed to me. In the first place, it is not the way they talked, and, in the second, human thought everywhere hasn't changed much for thousands of years, even if the languages have. Why not then translate that thought into the terms of to-day? The Snake Mother, of course, never used the word "bored," but there undoubtedly must have been some exact equivalent for it in her own vocabulary.

know, delirious most of the time as he had been?

Since leaving Chupan he had borne steadily toward the haunted Sierra, avoided the Quicha villages, except when it had been necessary to replenish his supplies. He had seen few Indians, the last few days none at all. Something whispered to him to be cautious.

Cautious? He grinned at the thought. It was hardly the word for this Quixotic adventure—one man headed deliberately into the grip of the power Suarra had named Yu-Atlanchi. He had seen something of that power when the Scarlet Weaver had raced across the plain pursued by the rider of the great black thunder lizard—the fleeing Spider-man, warped wickedly before birth into semblance of the spinning *Arachnida*.

How had Suarra named that rider? Lantlar—no, Lantlu! Lantlu, a man astride a scaled monster which modern science taught had been wiped off earth these million years and more; a man built in the semblance of some antique and ice-eyed demigod who had bridled a dragon!

And Suarra had hinted of other horrors of misshapen things besides the Spider-men, things whose shapes had also been evilly changed in the very crucible of birth.

Cautious! Graydon laughed outright. Yet, he reflected, one probably could exercise caution even in invading hell. And Suarra's land seemed rather close to some such place of the damned, if not over its borders. Lingered upon this interesting idea, he took stock of his assets for its invasion.

He had two serviceable automatics, one tucked in a holster under his left armpit, a high-powered rifle, and plenty of ammunition. He had seen to that before leaving Chupan. Good enough

—but Yu-Atlanchi might have, and probably did have, weapons that would make a rifle look like a bushman's bow and arrow. And what use would automatics and rifle be against the scaly armor of the dinosaurs? Well, he thought, with any luck at all they could at least account for Lantlu.

What else had he? A flicker of purple light from his wrist answered him—the gleam of the jeweled eyes in the bracelet of the Snake Mother. That might be worth a thousand guns and pistols, that bracelet! It would be if, as he hoped, it were a talisman to protect him against the Watchers.

And Graydon half believed that he might count on the favor of that weird being, part woman and part serpent, whose phantom he had seen stretched between him and the summoning Face in the Abyss.

But those two other equally enigmatic beings whom Suarra had called the Lords of Fate and Fools? The parrot-motley Lord of Fools might be on his side. Nay, in the eternal fitness of things ought, indeed, to look upon him as a favorite son, Graydon thought, grinning again. The black-staffed Lord of Fate would probably be neutral—and why not, reflected Graydon, since if he kept the books of Destiny for the region, he naturally must know the outcome of the matter.

"Come back to me! Oh—Graydon, come back to me!" Suarra had whispered. Back to her he would try to go, since never, he knew, could there be peace for him if he did not.

BY afternoon the trail had faded away or he had lost it. He hoped that it had ended, since that would be an indication that he was closing in upon his goal.

And once that day he thought he

had heard an elfin bugle, faint and far away—the faëry trumpeting which was the cry of the plumed and flying serpents!

When dusk fell he was in a little valley between sparsely wooded, close-lying ranges. A friendly stream gurgled and chuckled close to him. Graydon pitched camp beside the brook, stripped the burro, hobbled it, and turned it loose to graze. Then he built his fire, boiled his tea, prepared his supper. He measured with his eyes the southern range of hills.

Till now he had been lucky in being able to follow the valleys, with few climbs and none of them a stiff one. Here, a mountain lay directly in his path. About two thousand feet high, he reckoned it; not difficult to get over. The trees marched all the way up to its summit, singly and in platoons, always with a curious suggestion of careful planting.

He lay for awhile, thinking. His right arm was stretched outside his blanket. In the light of his dying fire the purple gems that were the eyes of the serpent-woman on the bracelet gleamed as though alive. Larger they seemed to grow—and larger. Sleep swept over Graydon like a wave.

He slept, and he knew that he slept; yet even in that deep sleep he was conscious of those eyes. He dreamed, and they guided his dream! It seemed to him that he passed swiftly over the moonlit waste. Ahead of him frowned a black barrier, shrouded him, and was gone. He had a glimpse of an immense circular valley rimmed by sky-piercing peaks. There was the silver glint of a lake, the liquid silver of a mighty torrent pouring out of the heart of a precipice. He caught wheeling sight of colossal, gigantic shapes of stone bathed in the milky flood of the moon, and each

guarding the black mouth of a cavern. A city rushed up to meet him, ruby-roofed and opal-turreted and fantastic as though built by jinn from the stuff of dreams.

And it seemed to him that he came to rest within a vast and columned hall from whose high roof fell beams of soft azure light. High arose the columns, unfolding far above into wondrous petalings of opal and of emerald, and of turquoise flecked by gold.

There, coiled upon a cushioned throne that stood just above the lip of a high wide alcove, was—the Snake Mother!

The Snake Mother! Last daughter of another lost race which had ruled an earth on which humanity, except for Suarra's people, had not yet reached the dawn of the Age of Stone. So far distant was that time! The Snake Mother—memory of whom, or of her sisters, may have given birth to those legends of the Naga Princesses whose wisdom reared the cities of the vanished Khmers in the Cambodian jungles. Yes, and may be the source of those persistent stories of serpent-women in the folk-lore of every land. May even be the germ of truth in that strange legend of Lilith, first wife of Adam, whom Eve ousted!

Her ageless face was human—and yet far from human. Her eyes, set far apart, were like living jewels filled with purple fires. Her forehead was wide and low. Her nose was delicate, the nostrils dilated. Her chin was small and pointed. Her mouth, too, was small, heart-shaped, and the lips a scarlet flame.

Down her narrow, childish shoulders flowed hair that gleamed like spun silver. It arrow-shaped into a point upon her forehead; it gave her face that same heart shape in which her lips were

formed, a heart of which the pointed chin was the tip. She had little high breasts, tilted. Face, neck, shoulders and breasts were the hue of pearls suffused faintly with rose; and like rosy pearls they glistened.

Her coils began just beneath her breasts! They were half-buried in the nest of silken cushions; thick coils and many; circle upon circle of them, covered with glimmering, heart-shaped scales, each scale as exquisitely wrought as by the hand of some elfin carver of gems; and each of them a jewel indeed—opaline, nacreous, suffused with palest rose.

Her hands were tiny as a child's. Like a child's, too, were her slender arms. Upon her face, that was neither woman's nor serpent's, but subtly both and, still more subtly, neither, was the stamp of an awesome wisdom, and a weariness and sadness that checked his heartbeat.

HE thrilled to the beauty of that heart-shaped little face, the glistening glory of hair, the exquisiteness of childish shoulders and hands. He felt a strange pity for her. He gave no heed to her coils, her un-human shape, her monstrosity; it was as though she reached down into his heart and plucked like a harp some deep string silent since birth. All his consciousness was centered in reverence and this new, strange love. So greatly centered indeed that for the moment he forgot Suarra!

And in that dream, still if dream it was, he knew that she was aware of all this; and well pleased. Her purple eyes softened, and brooded upon him, luminously tender. The rose-pearl column of her body reared up; she nodded to him. She raised her tiny hands to her forehead and cupped them, and

then with a curiously hieratic gesture lowered them, tipping them as she did so, as though she poured from them.

Now he saw that there were other thrones within the alcove. High above all was one as though carved from the heart of a colossal sapphire, oval and set upon a pedestal of milky crystal. It was empty, although around it clung, he thought, a faint radiance. At its base were six lesser thrones. One was red as though carved from ruby; one was black as though cut from jet; the thrones between the two were yellow gold.

Black throne and three of the golden thrones were tenantless. In the red throne sat the Lord of Fools, and beside him the Lord of Fate, regarding him like the Snake Mother with unwinking bright eyes.

The scarlet mouth of the Snake Mother opened, a slender, pointed, scarlet tongue flicked out and touched her red lips. Whether she spoke or did not, Graydon read her thought.

"I will hold up the hands of this man! Suarra loves him! He pleases *me*! Except for her, it has been long since I took interest in the lives of any who dwell in Yu-Atlanchi. Her desire flies to him, and his to her. So let it be! I grow weary of Lantlu and his crew. For one thing, Lantlu draws closer than I like to that shadow of Nimir they call the Dark One. Also, he would take Suarra. He shall not!"

"By the ancient compact," the Lord of Fate spoke, "by that compact, Adana, you may not use your secret wisdom against any of the Old Race. Your people, you of the Oldest Race, swore it. It was sworn to long, long ago, before the ice drove us from the ancient homeland. It has never been broken. Even you, Adana, last of the Oldest Race, cannot break that oath."

"S-s-s-s!" the Snake Mother's scarlet tongue flickered wrathfully. "Say you so, Malik! There was another side to that compact. Did not the Old Race also swear never to plot against any of us, the Serpent-people, nor consciously to work us harm? Yet Lantlu and his followers plot with the Dark One, the shadow of Nimir. They plot to free him from the fetters which long ago we forged for him. Free, he will seek to destroy us . . . and why should he not? . . . and perhaps he may! Heed that, Malik, and you, Tyddo—I say he may! Lantlu plots with Nimir; therefore he plots against me, the last of the Oldest Race! Very well—the ancient compact is broken. By him—not by me!"

The serpent-woman swayed forward on her gleaming coils, purple eyes glittering.

"Suppose we three abandon Yu-Atlanchi! Pass from it as did my ancestors and the Lords who were your peers? Leave it to its rot?"

THERE was a short silence, which the Lord of Fate broke.

"I cannot go, Adana. Until the last page of the book of the Old Race is turned I cannot go. You know that, Mother."

"And where there is nothing but folly, you of course must stay." The serpent-woman swayed her childish head toward the Lord of Fools. "But what is there to keep *me*? By the wisdom of my people! Here was a race of gray hairless apes that we took from their trees! Took them and taught them, and turned them into men! And what have they become? Dwellers in dream, paramours of phantoms, slaves of illusion! The others—swinging ever toward the darkness, lovers of cruelty; retainers of beauty,

outwardly—and within their masks, hideous. I sicken of them! They are loathsome to me! Yu-Atlanchi rots—nay, it is rotten! Let it die!"

"There is Suarra," said the Lord of Fools softly. "And there are others who are still sound. Will you abandon them?"

The Snake Mother's face softened. "There is Suarra," she whispered, "and there are—the others. But so few! By my ancestors, so few!"

"If it were their fault alone!" said the Lord of Fools. "But it is not, Adana. Better for them had we razed this barrier that has protected them; better for them had we let them make their own way against the wilderness, and what of enemies it held. Better for them had we never closed the Door of Death."

"Peace, Tyddo!" answered the serpent-woman sadly. "No more than Malik nor you would I abandon them. It was my woman's tongue talking. Yet there is a deeper reason why we may not. This Shadow of Nimir seeks a body. How strong Nimir may be, what he has forgotten of his old arts or what new arts he has learned through the ages, we do not know. My wisdom tells me he is far weaker than of old. But once again incarnate, freed from the stone, his old strength may swiftly return. We must prepare for battle, Old Ones. For should Nimir conquer, he will sit upon the throne of the Lord of Lords—and *we* must go! Nor will our going be orderly and as we may desire! And in time he will spread his dominion over all the world, as, other ages ago, he planned to do. And *that must not be!*"

The Lord of Fools stirred upon his throne, flapping about like a great red and yellow bird.

"Open your Book, Malik," he said.

"Read us from the pages not yet turned."

"You know I cannot," the Lord of Fate answered him. "I am but the keeper of the Book. I did not write it, nor may I, more than any other, read beyond the moment—"

"And what good would it do if he did read it?" interrupted the Snake Mother practically. "If it is to be war, as war I think it surely is to be, I, for one, have no desire to be weakened by knowing I am going to lose! Nor to be bored by knowing I am going to win! If one must exert one's self to such a degree as such war promises, one is surely entitled to the interest of uncertainty."

GRAYDON, for all the incredible weirdness of what he seemed to be seeing and hearing, chuckled involuntarily at this, it was so amazingly feminine. The serpent-woman looked at him as though she had heard, and there was a half malicious twinkle in her glowing eyes.

"And as for this man who seeks Suarra," she said, "let him come and find me! There is much in what you have said of our error in making life too easy for Yu-Atlanchi, Tyddo. Let us not repeat it. When this man, by his own wit and courage, has found the way to me, and stands before me in body as he now stands in thought, I will arm him with power. If we win, Suarra shall be his reward. In the meantime, for sign, I shall send my winged Messengers to him, that they may know him—and also that he may know he need fear them no more!"

The temple faded and disappeared. Graydon seemed to hear around and above him a storm of elfin buglings. He thought that he opened his eyes, threw off the blanket and arose.

And that all around him, glimmering with pale silver fires, were circles upon circles of the feathered serpents! They whirled and wheeled in countless spirals; hundreds upon hundreds of them, great and small, their paradisaal plumes gleaming like pale witch-fires, fencing gayly with long rapier beaks—the Watchers, the winged serpents that were the servants of the Snake Mother.

And abruptly were gone.

It was dawn when he awakened. Clearly from the southern mountains he heard a chorus of horn notes. He threw together a hasty breakfast, caught the burro and adjusted the packs upon it.

Whistling, he set forth up the mountain. The ascent was not difficult. In an hour he had reached the summit.

At his feet the ground sloped down to a level plain, dotted strangely with huge standing stones. Up from this plain and not five miles from where he stood arose the scarps of a great mountain. Its precipices marched in the arc of an immense circle, on and on beyond sight—

The ramparts of Yu-Atlanchi!

CHAPTER III.

THE LIZARD MEN.

THERE could be no doubt about it. Behind the barrier upon which he looked lay Yu-Atlanchi—and Suarra! The smooth plain studded with the giant stone menhirs was that over which the Scarlet Weaver, the spider-man, had scuttled on his grotesque stilt-like legs. The path along which Graydon had trodden on his way to the Face in the Abyss must be just below him.

As though to confirm his recogni-

tion, he heard high overhead a mellow bugle-call. Thrice the note sounded, then thrice again—once from the base of the slope whose top he trod, once from far out on the plain, and then, faintly, from close to the distant mountain wall itself—as though directing Graydon's way.

He began to descend. Soon he was at the edge of the plain and making his way across it. The monoliths were mightier than he had judged, and their regularity, like that of the trees behind him, hinted of human agency in their placing. He halted at one, his interest caught by what appeared to be carvings. But if carvings, they were so ancient and time-worn that they were like ghosts, fading and vanishing under closer gaze.

Mostly he hurried across the plain, urging on the indignant burro with lusty slaps whenever it loitered to graze upon the high grass. He had no mind to be caught in the open there as the spider-man had been. And ever as he went he listened with taut nerves for that hissing chorus which was the hunting-cry of Lantlu's hellish pack.

It was early afternoon when he reached the mountain. The rock was basaltic, black and adamant hard. The scarps thrust themselves up almost perpendicularly from the plain, at their base remarkably little débris or broken-away fragments. They were unscalable. At least, that part before him was. Which way should he go? As though answering his question, he heard once more the mellow horn note high in air, and southward.

"South it is," said Graydon cheerfully, and resumed his march. An hour slipped by, and another. Still the dark barrier remained unbroken.

It was not until the second hour before sunset that he found the crevice.

From far away his eye had caught a verdancy, a green banner streaming down the face of the escarpment a hundred feet or more above its base. As he drew near he saw that there had been a shattering of the rock at this point. Rubble studded with immense boulders lay piled against the cliff. Bushes and small trees had found foothold and had climbed to the very top of the breast.

Graydon, studying the breast to determine its cause, saw what looked like a narrow crack in the rock wall above the mound. Curiosity drove him to examine it. The burro watched him until he was halfway up the hill, and then with a protesting bray scrambled after him.

"So you don't like being left alone here, Sancho Panza," laughed Graydon. "Well, I don't blame you."

The little beast nuzzled his hand. There was something moving about its trustfulness. He had a sharp realization of his own precarious position.

"Stick close, old chap," he told the burro. "I'll do the best I can for you. But I'm afraid we're not what the insurance companies would call a good risk."

HE pressed on to the top. The crevice was wider than it had seemed from the plain. He pushed through the last of the bushes. Here he found the end of the fissure was about four feet wide. It was very dark within it. He knelt and shot around the rays of his search light. Rocks littered the floor, but the place was dry. He saw also that it extended back beyond the reach of the light, and that it widened as it retreated. He looked at the sky. There was still an hour before sundown. Graydon began to collect his firewood. The burro had

found the leaves of some of the bushes much to its liking and was already having its supper.

He threw down the last armload of faggots. Then he walked farther back along the fissure. A hundred paces and his light fell upon a rock wall; the end of it, he supposed. But he found when he reached it that the cleft made an abrupt turn at this point and continued, apparently indefinitely. He heard water dripping. At his left drops were exuding from the stone, were caught in a small natural basin, then flowed away in a thin stream. Was it a fissure? It was more like a crypt—perhaps a tunnel! He turned his flash upward. He could see no roof, but neither could he see the sky.

Well, he would do some exploring next morning. There was no use bothering about it now, besides he was tired. He hauled the burro away from its feast, into the shelter, tethered it to a spur of rock, and, after he had eaten, rolled himself up in his blanket and promptly went to sleep. That night he did not dream.

He awakened early, the desire hot within him to see where the fissure led. Could it be a breach in Yu-Atlanchi's walls? Or would it turn out to be an impasse, a blind alley? Without bothering to breakfast he swung down it. When he had gone about three hundred paces past the tiny spring the passage turned sharply, this time resuming its original direction. Not far ahead of him was something like a gray, palely luminous curtain stretched across it. He snapped off his flash and crept forward.

It was not a curtain. It was daylight!

Graydon looked down a deep rift in the mountain, a hundred feet wide, with walls as smoothly precipitous as

though cleft by the single stroke of a Titan's sword. It ran due east, facing the rising sun. There was no other way to account for the volume of light that filtered down into the narrow cañon. Its floor was level and smooth. Along one side of it ran the trickle of the spring. There was no vegetation. Not even the hardy, rock-loving lichens.

Where it might lead, what its perils, Graydon had no means of knowing. He gave the latter slight thought; time enough for that when they materialized. The cañon might be blind or—a gate to Suarra! There was only one way to determine which. He must follow it.

He went back to his shelter, watered the burro and tethered it among the bushes.

"Eat hearty, Sancho," he bade it. "God alone knows when you get your next meal."

He made a fire and broke his own fast. He waited then until the burro had adequately filled itself, fastened on the packs, and finally with considerable difficulty got the little brute to the cañon door. After that it ambled along ahead of him, apparently quite contented with its lot.

FOR a mile the cañon ran as straight as though laid out by a surveyor's level. Then it began to turn and twist, widen and narrow, dip and climb. Small rocks and boulders appeared in ever-growing numbers on its floor.

The tiny trickle, augmented by other seepages from the cliffs, had grown into a small brook. The rocky walls had changed from black to a reddish yellow. A stunted, pallid vegetation grew sparsely beside the flowing water and among the broken stones.

From time to time he caught

glimpses of roughly rounded holes high up the cliffs, apertures that seemed to be the mouths of tunnels or caves. They stared at him from the ocherous rock like huge pupilless eyes. With that sharpening of the faculties the wilderness effects, Graydon sensed that something deadly lurked there. He watched them warily, rifle ready. There was a faint taint in the air, a faintly acrid, musky odor vaguely familiar. It was like—now what was it like? It was like the reek of alligators in some infested, sluggish jungle creek!

The taint grew stronger, the number of the cave mouths increased. The burro began to show nervousness, halting and sniffing, then reluctantly plodding on as Graydon reassured it with encouraging words and pats.

Ahead of him about a hundred feet the cañon made another of its abrupt almost right-angled turns. And suddenly from beyond the buttress that hid the way from him there came an appalling outburst of hissings and gruntings. At the same time a gust of the musky stench smote his nostrils, nauseating him. The burro halted, stood stock-still, apparently paralyzed by terror.

Punctuating the hissing clamor he heard the cries of men. Graydon sprang forward. He turned the corner. Just ahead of him were three tall Indians, clad like the one who had led him to the frontier of the forbidden land, but in yellow instead of blue. Like that Indian, they wore around their foreheads wide thin bands of gold. Circling them, tearing at them with fangs and claws, were a score or more of creatures which at first glance he took for giant lizards, and at second realized were, if not men, at least semi-human!

The things stood a little over four

feet high. Their leathery skins were a dirty yellow. They balanced themselves upon squat, stocky legs whose feet were like paws and flat and taloned. Their arms were short and powerful, their hands were pads, duplicates almost of their feet, but with longer claws.

It was their faces that chilled Graydon's blood. Over their slender, narrow, pointed foreheads their heads were covered with scarlet scales which stood upright like multiple coxcombs. Their eyes were red, round and unwinking. Their noses were flat, but under them their jaws extended in a broad six-inch snout armed with yellow fangs, strong and cruel as a crocodile's. They had no chins, and only rudiments of ears.

But there was no mistaking the human element in them. Man and lizard inextricably, inexplicably mingled! Around their loins were filthy strips of cloth.

The three Indians stood back to back in a triangle, battering at these lizard-men with maul-tipped clubs of some shining metal. That they had given good account of themselves a half dozen of the creatures, heads crushed in but bodies still squirming, gave proof. But now in rapid succession first one Indian and then a second was pulled to the ground and hidden by loathsome bodies.

Graydon threw off his paralysis and shouted to the remaining Indian. He raised his rifle, took rapid and careful aim, and fired. The lizard-man he had picked out staggered under the impact of the bullet, then dropped. At the report, echoing like a miniature peal of thunder from the rocky walls, the pack turned as one toward him, fanged mouths open and staring, their bodies crouched, glaring at him with the unwinking red eyes.

The Indian stooped, lifted the body of one of his comrades, and sprang clear. Freed from fear of hitting him, Graydon emptied his rifle into the beasts.

He rapidly reloaded his magazine. Then, as he began dropping them, they broke from their stupor, leaped for the walls, and like true lizards swarmed up the sheer faces of the cliffs. Hissing and screeching, they darted into the black mouths of the caves. They vanished into their dark depths.

THE Indian stood with his wounded comrade in his arms. There was amazement and stark awe on his finely featured brown face. Graydon threw the rifle thong around his neck, held out both hands in the universal gesture of peace. The Indian gently lowered the other to the ground and bowed low, the backs of his hands to his forehead.

Graydon jumped; something had touched his back. He turned. It was the soft nose of the burro nudging him. He laughed, and walked toward the Indian. He stopped for a moment to look more closely at the creatures his bullets had dropped. He saw that only those whose skulls had been pierced by the high-powered bullets lay there. And the limbs of these drew up and down spasmodically as though they still lived.

One of them had been shot straight through the heart as well as the head. But still that heart beat on. He could see the leathery yellow chest throb with its pulsations. Only those whose skulls had been crushed by the clubs seemed quite dead.

And again the perverted humanness of these things shook him. They, or their ancestors, had once been men!

Taken at the saurian stage of the human embryo's evolution, and by some accursed art diverted there into blend of man and lizard!

One of them lay face down. The stained breech-clout had slipped off. At the base of its spine was a blunt, scaled tail.

He was aware of the first Indian beside him. He saluted again, and methodically began to crush with his club the heads of those that Graydon had shot.

"This," he said in the Aymara, "so they cannot live again. It is the only way."

Graydon walked over to the second Indian. He was unconscious and badly mauled, but not necessarily fatally, so he thought, going carefully over the wounds. He took his emergency kit out of the saddlebag, treated and bandaged the worst of them. He looked up to see the other Indian standing over him, watching with eyes in which the awe was stronger.

"If we can get him to some place where those brutes can't interrupt, I can do more for him," said Graydon, also in the Aymara tongue, rising to his feet.

"A little way," answered the Indian, "and we will be safe from them, O Mighty Lord!"

"Let's go," said Graydon in English, grinning at the title.

He bent down and lifted the wounded man's shoulders. The Indian took his feet. Burro once more in the lead, they made their way down the cañon. The staring openings of the caves watched them. Within them nothing stirred, but Graydon felt upon him the gaze of malignant eyes—the devil eyes of the lizard-men hidden in the shadow of their lairs!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



A head and shoulders rose out of the moonlit gully

Written in Sand

Little by little a mystery unfolded itself to Bob Zane out on the desert, but for a solution he had to ask the murmuring sands themselves

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

A Whispering Tale

THERE are nights when a camp fire seems to profane the desert, and this was one of them. The moon hung low and round in the heavens, and the Colorado Basin was bathed in warm, mellow light like the amber of old wine.

But I wanted fried potatoes for breakfast, and I'd put off cooking them until the night got cooler. Boil potatoes for half an hour, then let them stand overnight, cut them into slices and fry them with onions, add a little bacon and wash down with coffee. That's a breakfast that'll stay by you. That's why my camp fire was crackling away under the desert moon, and the water was bubbling and steaming over the potatoes.

Off to the west, a mile or so, was Signal Butte. To the east, the lights of Calexico and Mexicali twinkled like brazen jewels. To the north, the Superstition Mountains basked in the light of the mellow moon.

The flames of the camp fire died down to a bed of glowing coals. A light breeze came up from out of the night, and the desert commenced to whisper.

Desert whispers are funny things, and they vary just as the desert varies. Up around Death Valley the desert whispers will be hard and hissing, filled with an ominous menace. Down here by the border, they'll be languid, romantic, dreamy.

But the Colorado Basin's a funny

desert, anyway. Down by the Superstition Mountains, where the whole valley is under sea level, and the soil is composed mostly of silt that's been washed down by the big river, the whole desert's entirely different from what it is a hundred miles north. Deserts are like that. At times you'll have high stretches covered with giant cacti and greasewood. Then you'll have barren places where even a stray sage can't get nourishment. But always you will hear whispers. They're the heritage of the desert.

Of course, those whispers aren't really voices. I know as well as you do that they're the noises made by the sand scurrying along on the wings of the desert winds and rustling against the cacti and the sage. And then, when the wind gets stronger, you can hear the sound of sand rustling against sand, the strangest whisper of all.

But here's something to think about: Those sand whispers somehow or other color the whole desert country. Meet a man who's lived a long time in the desert, and there'll be a husky hiss in his voice, a dry whispering note that brands every word he utters. And the desert teems with other whispers, whispers of lost mines, of fabulous fortunes buried by the Spaniards when the Indians turned hostile.

I WAS thinking about those whispers when the desert began to whisper to me. The ashes glowed in the breath of the wind. The sand scurried by and made little whispering noises, tantalizing sounds that were almost words. I strained my ears to listen—and while I was listening I heard the other sounds that weren't whispers.

There was the sound of feet in the dry wash, feet that weren't accustomed to walking on sand. They shuffled,

stumbled, stamped a couple of times as the man lurched forward, then shuffled again. They came nearer. A head and shoulders showed in the moonlight as a man came up out of the wash.

"Howdy," he said, while he was still thirty yards off, and his voice was anxious.

"Howdy," I said.

He came toward me then, and the moonlight sent a short black shadow splotching the white floor of the desert until it looked like a moving blot of ink.

"You're Bob Zane?" he asked.

"Yes," I told him, and waited.

He sat down by the camp fire and **held out his hands** to the coals as though it had been cold. But it was a warm night.

"They told me I'd find you out near Signal Butte. I had a hard time trying to locate you. Then I saw your fire."

I waited until he looked up from the coals. Then I said, "Yes."

He looked back into the fire right away.

"My name's Lucas," he said, "Pete Lucas. They tell me you know the desert from A to Z."

"Nobody really knows the desert, Lucas," I said.

He shuffled his weight around as though the sand was uncomfortable. He rubbed his hands, and then held them toward the coals some more. What he wanted to say didn't come easy. I didn't give him any encouragement. Talk that's hard to say out on the desert ain't the sort of talk that's easy to listen to.

The red embers caught the front of his face. The moon silvered the silhouette. All in all, I got a good look at him. He was about forty years old, and he had something to conceal.

His head moved in swift jerks on a

nervous neck. His mouth was weak and the chin was pointed. The nose spread out into wide nostrils. The eyes were weak and watery. The big sombrero that he'd tilted back was obviously new.

"You could help me," he said.

I didn't say anything. Any man that had any proposition to make to me could make it unaided.

"I need somebody that knows the desert."

I kept silent.

He looked up at me, his watery eyes blinking in the red light of the glowing embers.

"If a gent had been out in the desert to some sort of a secret place, could you track him to that place? If you got started within, say, twelve hours?"

I shook my head.

"I might, and again I mightn't. Winds come up awful fast in the desert countries."

He sighed and let his eyes blink out over the desert.

"But suppose you got started a little sooner?"

"Well, how much sooner?"

"Three or four hours."

"That sounds more like it."

"What sort of a proposition could I make you—in money?"

"I don't know. What could you?"

"I could offer you a thousand dollars for the job. But you'd want to be awfully certain you could do it. If you fell down it would lose me a lot of money."

I ventured an innocent comment:

"We could track him some other time."

"No," he said, shaking his head, "he wouldn't make any more tracks."

I said nothing for a while, but listened to the sand whispers of the desert. The moon looked like a great

pumpkin just over my head. The mountains were purple shadows against the golden glow of the night sky, and the sagebrush cast black shadows.

MY visitor was looking at me now, staring straight and steady, but that was because I was looking out into the desert. As soon as I turned my eyes back to his face, he started looking at the coals again. The sand whispered little snatches of sound that were almost words but weren't.

"Maybe we'd be crowding too close on this fellow, and he'd get wise," I suggested.

"No. When we start there won't be nothing to be afraid of along that line. It'll be just a question of finding out where he went. There'll be two sets of tracks, one going out, one coming back."

I added to his words, sort of casual-like:

"And the man that made 'em will be dead?"

He jumped back from the fire and got to his feet.

"I didn't say that!"

"No; so you didn't! It must have been that the desert whispered it to me."

He stood, teetering back and forth on his feet.

"Pshaw!" he said after a bit, and turned and strode away into the desert just like he'd come, his feet shuffling, the black shadow bobbing along over the silvery sand.

I DRAINED the water off of the potatoes and spread my blankets.

I thought there was something else that moved out there in the desert. Coyote, maybe, but I wasn't sure. Twice I got a glimpse of motion, and then there wasn't anything except the

moonlight, the warm night, the sighing wind and the sand whispers.

I got under a light blanket, saw that my burro was all jake, and pillowed my head on the saddle.

I started drifting off to sleep the way a man does in the open desert. And the sand whispered a lullaby. My muscles relaxed, and isolated thoughts flitted through my brain. The sand whispers became words and strung out into a whole sentence.

There was something startling in that sentence, something I should know. It snapped me wide awake, it was so important. I felt the sense of the whisper slipping as I woke up, and I tried to hang on to what it was. But it was no use. I snapped wide awake to the moon that was shining down in my face, and the whispers were nothing but sand rustling against sand.

I didn't go back to sleep again right away. There was something I was trying to get, like reaching for a lost dream. Sometimes I almost knew what it was, but never well enough to get it fixed, just a hazy impression.

The wind went down as suddenly as it had come up. The moon shone steady and brilliant, and I went to sleep.

Daylight found me slicing the potatoes with onions. The bacon sizzled in the frying pan, and then I dumped in the onions and potatoes. When they were browned to a turn I washed them down with coffee.

But all the time, I was thinking of the man with the broad nose and the watery eyes, whose hands had seemed cold so he had to toast 'em over the embers of the desert fire. I remembered the flicker of motion I'd seen out in the moonlight. Somehow or other, the desert whispers seemed concerned with that flicker of motion.

The sun came up over the Chocolate Mountains, and the long shadows settled over the desert. Right away it commenced to get hot.

I got my camp stuff staked out in the shade of a mesquite clump and saddled my burro. Then I went out to where I'd seen that flicker of motion. The tracks in the desert told the story.

The man with the watery eyes, who had given the name of Pete Lucas, had come floundering over the desert with shuffling feet. Some distance behind him had been a dainty-footed girl, walking as lightly as a young doe. While Lucas had been talking with me, the girl had been lying down on the slope of a sand dune where she could watch him. I didn't think it was close enough to enable her to hear what had been said.

When Lucas left, she left, too, following him.

I back-tracked the girl for a ways, trying to get a good imprint of her foot. It was dainty and small, but she handled her feet as though she knew what she was doing with 'em.

I got a track in a patch of silt soil that was a good one. It showed that the left heel had a little chip gouged out of it, probably by a rock. For the rest there wasn't anything except tracks of a woman's shoes.

I RODE the burro into Mexicali. I like it south of the border, like to watch the types that come and go; besides, it's all a desert country and the desert has got into my blood. When you first see the desert and get out in it, you'll either like it or you'll hate it. Most of the time, if you hate it, it'll be because you're afraid of it. Then, after a while, when the desert gets into your blood, you'll find it motherly.

But it's a jealous mother, and it only takes care of its own. Those that know the desert and respect its power get along in it. Those that get flippant are likely to be found some place with circling buzzards, swollen tongue, and fingers that have had the flesh ribboned from the bone through delirious digging for water.

The desert's got me. I have to be out in it. It's in my blood. I don't stay long around the border ports. It's an interesting sight to see—once in a while. After that you want to forget it.

But I did want to see if I could find a girl with the heel of her left shoe chipped.

I found the guy with the watery eyes, and I kept him from seeing me. The gambling tables were just opening up, and the big horseshoe bar in the old Owl, that's now the A. B. W. Club, was swinging into action.

This chap, Lucas, was looking for somebody. After an hour or so he found him; I could tell by the expression in his eyes. The vague, watery look vanished, and the eyes snapped to hazel hardness. The flat nose expanded until the nostrils were two black, round holes, and Lucas wet his lips with his tongue.

I followed his eyes to the man he'd spotted. He was a big man, with a great dome of a forehead and eyes that were puckered in thought. He wasn't accustomed to the desert places, and the sun hadn't been kind to his skin. The eyes were red-rimmed from drink and sun, and he seemed a little bit shaky. He took a couple of cocktails, and then went to the gaming tables. He gambled until noon, and then he had some lunch. He played roulette and he was about a thousand dollars ahead. After lunch, he ran into a streak of bad luck. His

pile melted, and as it melted he began to plunge, which is the wrong way to gamble. Any old gambler will tell you to crowd your luck when it's coming your way, but to hold 'em close to your chest when you're cold.

And Lucas kept watching the big chap with the dome forehead, keeping in the background, watching, watching, watching.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, when the big chap was down to his last stack, luck turned. He rode it hard. He bet the limit straight up and won time and again. The chips were scattered all out in a big pile. They changed croupiers half a dozen times. He just kept on winning and winning and winning.

THEN when he must have had five thousand dollars in front of him, the chap with the watery eyes walked up and tapped him on the forehead.

The big man had just won a bet. His face was flushed with liquor and success. He turned impatient eyes as he scooped in the chips, and then froze into startled inactivity. His jaw sagged until I could see his pink gullet. The eyes bulged until the red rim seemed an inch wide.

"Pete Lucas!" he said, and his voice held nothing of welcome.

Lucas laughed, and the laugh was harsh.

"You're not having to go out in the desert to-night, eh, Sam Slade?"

"Out in the desert—how—what do you mean?"

"You know what I mean."

Slade scooped his chips toward the croupier.

"Quitting," he said.

"Afraid you might lose some of 'em back?" the croupier sneered.

Slade's eyes snapped cold and hard. "You heard me," he said.

I didn't like the expression of his eyes. I've seen killers before, from outlaw horses to rattlesnakes. He had the look of a killer. The croupier saw it too, and he didn't say anything. He rang a bell, and the money came in.

Then, when he had the money all laid out, Slade did a funny thing. He divided it into two equal piles, and Pete Lucas took one of the piles. Somehow or other, though, it was just what I'd been expecting.

Then they walked into a restaurant, the San Diego Bar and Café.

That suited me. I wanted eats, and they make 'em good at the San Diego. Chinese cooks and waiters, anything you want: venison, quail, doves, lobster, oysters. I sat down where I could see them when they went out. No use to try and see 'em while they ate. The booths had curtains up the side, and were built for privacy.

I had some broiled baby lobster, some quail on toast and a bottle of Tipo wine that dated back ten years—you can get it if you know the ropes.

Low voices came from the booth where the two men ate. Once I heard a sharp exclamation, and a chair scraped back. Then a voice talked low and fast, and I heard the chair being pulled back to the table. After that there was more talking.

Then the Chinese waiter disappeared, and a pair of jet black eyes bored into mine over the top of a serving tray.

"**W**ANT some dessert?"

It was a girl. I'd place her at around twenty-three or four. She knew her way about, and she'd lived. There was a snap to the jaw that was all business. Her eyes

were like a couple of ripe olives. The complexion was clear and dark. The hair was a piled mass of midnight clouds that framed her face.

"Well?" she wanted to know.

I shook my head. "Nothing more."

She dropped the curtain and went toward the other booth. I looked at her as she bent over, picking dishes off the table. As she reached for a dish across the table, there was the flash of a silk-stockinged leg as she kicked it out behind her to keep her balance, and I caught a glimpse of the heel.

It had a chip gouged out.

There it was, a little drama of life taking place right before my eyes, and yet I couldn't get it pieced together.

I paid my check and sipped my wine until the glass was empty. Then I went out into the streets of the desert town. There was the usual crowd of tourists, and there was something else—low-hung black clouds, that scraped the tops of the mountains and sent black streamers trailing toward the ground.

Rain in the desert. It happens, but mighty infrequently.

The rain started within fifteen minutes, and the silt soil turned to a slick mud on top of a hard foundation that was like grease smeared on cement. People tried to walk across the street and their feet flew out from under. Automobiles skidded and slid into a devil's dance that swept 'em against curbs with crushed wheels, or crashed 'em into each other.

The rain came down in swift torrents for half an hour, and then there was a rift in the clouds, a patch of blue sky, and the sun was shining.

People who knew the desert stood on the sidewalks to see the cloud effects. The tourists lapped up the booze and plunged into the gambling games. The desert showed clear and sparkling, the

clouds melted as by magic, and the sun's rays beat down.

Then, right in the middle of my speculation as to what I was going to do next, there was the scream of a woman. It was a knife-like scream, thin and drawn with terror; and then the sound of a shot crashed out.

A Chinaman shrilled a staccato sentence in Cantonese, and scuttled out of the San Diego bar like a frightened quail scurrying for cover. Another Chinese followed on his heels. A tipsy American bellowed for the police. A bartender in a white apron came out and looked up and down the street. A khaki-clad little brown man with a heavy revolver swinging from his hip sprinted for the door, slipped on the wet mud that had been tracked to the pavement, skidded into the arms of the bartender. The bartender took him in.

I managed to be well in the lead of the crowd of gawkers that pushed in.

THE girl with the black eyes was on the floor. There was a little pearl-handled gun near her right hand. And there was a red streak along her forehead. The eyes were turned way up into her head, and were fluttering nervously.

She looked as though she'd been creased by a bullet, and then slammed to the floor with a good punch. I made for the booth where Lucas and Slade had been eating.

It was empty. There was a litter of dishes and some wine bottles, and a couple of glasses still half filled with whisky. The two men had gone.

The Chinese began to filter back from shelter. They were furtive-eyed, utterly dazed. They shook their heads with lots of "no savvy's" until an interpreter came up.

Then there was a lot of jabbering in

Cantonese, and the interpreter told the story. It was painfully simple. The Chinese waiter had been approached by the girl, who asked him to take five dollars and let her wait on the tables for half an hour. He had done so. There had been a scream, a blow and a shot, and there was the girl. That was all he knew. He hadn't seen any one who had been eating. The girl was waiting on them.

That's the way with the Chinese. When they want to disguise the truth they always hang together and get a yarn that's got just enough of truth in it to make a good foundation for whatever falsehoods they want to add.

The Mexican police took charge, the girl was taken out on a stretcher and things went on the same as ever.

I poked around the gambling halls trying to find a trace of the two men. Nothing doing. I made inquiries about the girl. They'd taken her across the line over into El Centro. She was seriously hurt with a concussion and possible fracture. She was unconscious. The doctor's orders were against any visitors when she recovered consciousness.

The two men had disappeared as utterly as though they had been wiped out.

The desert settled back to its whispers, to the monotony of cloudless skies and sun-swept days. The last I heard of the girl she was conscious, expected to recover, but not saying anything as to how it all happened.

And there was another funny development. The night of the shooting a Mexican had sold a team of horses and a light cart to two men. They had driven off. Three days later the team had been discovered northeast of Holtville. The horses had been running. There was blood on the dashboard.

Apparently the horses had been wandering on their own for nearly two days. They'd struck some alfalfa and were feeding when discovered. But they were encrusted with dried sweat and had been traveling without water.

Gold was reported in the Panamints; a new strike, placer. I always liked placer. It's a one-man proposition, no great outlay for mill and refinery, no blocking out of ore and looking for capital, no delving underground. And again, I always liked new strikes.

So I flung on the packs, saddled the riding burro and started the trek north. Sometimes I thought of the girl and the two men, and sometimes at night the desert would whisper strange sounds, sentences that seemed to indicate I was to have more of them, was to write a closing chapter to the incident. But I could never make anything more out of it than whispers.

If I was awake enough to listen, I was too awake to understand. If I could make sense out of the sand whispers, it was because my consciousness was dulled with sleep, and I wouldn't wake up until morning, trying to remember the sand whispers like I would a dream.

The placer proved to be a bunch of hooley, put across by some get-rich-quick mining company that was unloading stock in Los Angeles; but I had to cover half of the Panamints and a shoulder of the Funeral Range before I discovered it was a plant. By that time I was thinking of the border again, and I turned the burros back there.

ON the map, if it's large scale enough, you'll find a little place that's listed as Andrade. It's on the Colorado, just west of Yuma, where the California boundary takes a jog

down the river. And that twenty-odd mile jog of boundary takes in some of the toughest border country in the States, bar none.

It's a saying in the customs at Tijuana that the farther east you go the tougher it gets. They have reference to Mexicali. Go to Mexicali and you'll hear the same thing. The farther east, the tougher the border. They have reference to this jog in the boundary.

Anyway, the place is listed on the map as Andrade. Go there and you'll find it's Cantu on one side of the line, and Los Algodones on the other. You won't find anything that looks like Andrade.

And there's lots of action at Los Algodones. They say there's never been a border crew there for six months that didn't have white hair. The theory is that six months on that post will give any of 'em white hair.

Anyhow, I went to Los Algodones, across the drifting sand hills that never stay put, but march like great white ghosts across the face of the desert. My burros were staked and watered, and I had an evening on my hands. I tried roulette and won, and got tired of it.

The evening begins at Los Algodones at around three o'clock in the afternoon. It's over by six. Ask any of the wise ones why they don't keep that section of the border open until nine o'clock, the way they do at Tijuana and Mexicali, and see what he says. If he's a wise one he'll say it with a smile. If he uses words, it's an odds-on shot he won't be one of the wise ones—or else he'll be figuring on leaving the border.

I went into the Log Cabin and rubbed around for a while, and then I went to one of the places where the

girls hustle drinks for a commission. It's all done right out in front. A square of dance floor, a greasy-skinned orchestra, a long bar, girls who can flick eyes over a face and classify the character at a glance, and the tourists, suckers, hangers-on and rubbernecks. The girls could play the game straight—or not. Mostly, at Los Algodones there aren't many tourists.

THERE I saw her. The same black eyes, just like two moist ripe olives, the same full lips, the same swing to her walk, the same independent poise of her head.

A blowzy kid with staring eyes gave me a level glance of appraisal, then turned away. A cute trick came mincing up to me, talked a few words of baby talk and made a half-hearted attempt to smile winsomely. Then she went away.

The black-eyed kid came over. "Hello, pard."

"Hello."

"Looking around?"

"Looking around."

"Listen, big boy, I'm on the up and up. I'm hustling drinks. If you want to dance give me a chance. I can use the ticket. If you want to drink and want somebody to can the mush and drink alongside of you, I need the coin. If you're just rubbering don't waste my time and I won't waste yours. You look like a guy that knows the ropes and knows what he wants. I'm the kid that hands it to 'em straight."

I nodded. "We'll sit at a booth and have a couple of drinks and a talk."

She jerked her head toward the bartender and walked to a table.

"Here's mud in your eye," she said.

I looked her over. "Last time I saw you was when you were being taken to a hospital."

She straightened a bit.

"Yes?"

"Yes. How did you happen to get into this racket?"

She smiled cheerfully. "None of your damned business!" she answered.

I nodded and drank my beer. She watched me with speculative eyes.

"You Bob Zane?"

"Yes; why?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Wondering about the night you lay back of a sand hill and watched a man talking to me?"

"Say, you're a wise guy, ain't you?"

"You might be surprised."

"Not me! 'Nother drink?"

"One more."

She waved a hand toward the bartender.

He started toward the booth, and the outer door opened. A sloppy man with hard eyes set in a flabby face pushed his stomach through the entrance.

"That's my call," said the girl.

"Sorry, Bob Zane, but you're ditched. I wanted to talk to you, but I've got a date."

And she did what blamed few dance hall girls do to a guy who is spending—she got up and left me, cold. The bartender grinned and walked away. I turned my head so I could get a better look at the man who had entered.

Right away I saw that she had been lying. She didn't have any date with him. As far as I could see, he'd never set eyes on her before.

But she was out to make him. She tried all the wiles of the dance hall girl. And, in the end, he motioned to the cute trick with the winsome smile and the mincing walk.

The kid with the olive eyes got a chance and whispered to the cute trick. The cutie let her eyes widen, nodded her head. After a little while she plead-

ed some excuse, shunted the fat one to the girl with the olive eyes, and beat it.

The paunchy man and the girl who had been drinking with me talked and drank. Mostly they talked. At first it was the regular line of conversation. Then it got lower and more confidential. When I left the place the fat man was pulling himself across the slimy surface of the moist table by his elbows, so that his voice would carry to the girl without his having to speak loud.

What they were talking about I couldn't tell, but they didn't have eyes or ears for anything or any one else.

I FILED that fact away, went over to the Casino, where I tried a system at roulette. The system didn't work, but it came near enough to it so my original five dollars lasted me pretty well through the afternoon.

The border was about to close when I got back to the dance hall. It's a period of frantic haste. Perspiring bartenders fling drinks at the crowd that's determined to get in its last lick. Couples stop dancing, hurry to the bar and start scurrying for the border a good ten minutes too early—afraid of getting left.

I looked around for the girl with the olive eyes and the fat man, and didn't get a trace of either. Then a subtle whisper rippled the crowd; glasses clanged to the bar, and the exodus commenced. Ten seconds, and the bar was deserted. Another ten seconds and the doors were closed, locked, and the street became a parade toward the border.

Tired-eyed inspectors surveyed the seething mass with skilled eye. Occasionally their hands darted out, and some man or woman stepped aside. They weeded the sheep from the goats with a flicker of steely glance that pen-

etrated the mask of indifference the smuggler tries to wear. It's possible to smuggle a bottle across the border—but the percentages are against it.

I got to my burro, said good night to the inspectors, and swung toward my camp. It was dark when I got there. I started the fire, spoke to the animals, went to the packs to get out a fresh can of coffee; and heard a scream.

It was a thin scream, sounding as though I'd heard it before. It was the scream of a woman locked in a struggle with some adversary, losing her strength, but fighting with sheer nerve.

I kicked out the fire. No use to be outlined against flame, a perfect target. Then I went toward that scream, on the run.

I saw them when I was within forty or fifty yards; the bulk of two figures against the grayish white of the sand, the slender form of the girl swaying and swinging, the bulky figure of the man.

As I came up, he got his hands to her throat.

Then I saw it was no mere struggle between man and woman, but that he was trying to murder her. He heard my steps, and his hand relaxed from her throat as he stiffened. His hand streaked for a gun, but I was on him before his fingers touched metal.

He was like a huge bear. The strength of his arms was enormous, but he was a flabby bear. Soft living had made the tremendous muscles soft. And the desert does one thing for a man. It whips his strength into tireless endurance.

When those hands grasped me I knew his strength was too great for an immediate victory. But I pried loose, sank a punch into the heavy stomach and began a dancing chase, flicking blows home when I had the

opportunity. Then when he was panting and puffing, I walked in, let him grasp me, and showed him that bulk never makes for a long struggle.

I was reaching for his throat, not that I actually intended to throttle him, but just to give him a taste of what he had given the girl, when he went limp in my arms. The great weight jerked me forward, broke my grip and sent me stumbling over it. The flabby man rolled to all fours, got to his feet and ran into the darkness.

I turned to the limp bundle of femininity.

An automobile roared into speed. Lights sent twin shafts gleaming into the darkness, then swung in a half arc; a red taillight winked mockingly, then was swallowed in dust, and the sound of the motor became fainter.

THE girl stirred in my arms.

"Get him!" she said.

It was the girl of the olive eyes.

I took her back to the camp fire. She sipped the tea I gave her, her face bitter, her lips clamped together.

"You'll have to ride a burro to get where you want to go," I said.

She shook her head. "I don't want to go anywhere."

I said nothing. The desert stretched about us, a great waste of tumbled rock hills, sage and sand. Off to the east the river lapped at the dry soil.

"I hate it!" she spat, and as she spoke the golden rim of a moon, just past the full, swung over the red mountain rim. "God, how I hate the desert! Of all the grim, remorseless, unjust places on earth, the desert is it."

Never have I heard a woman speak with such hatred.

"The desert," I told her, "is misunderstood. You must know its ways, which are as the ways of a woman.

When you know it, it is a wise mother. It does justice after a fashion of its own, but it is always justice."

I put some more sage on the fire. It flamed up into a warm circle of ruddy light.

"Bah!" she flung at me.

I said nothing. A desert wind came up with the moon, and the sand began its interminable whispers.

"How I hate it all! I hate the dry heat, the glittering sand! I hate the wind that makes everything whisper. Those whispers! They always seem to be promising something, and they lie! Sand lies, that's what they are."

"No," I said gently; "the whispers don't lie. Perhaps your ears lie."

And then she began to talk, the words pouring from her mouth so fast they trod on each other's heels.

"Listen. There were two men. Either of them could have given me the information that I wanted more than life itself. Either could have saved my husband from a living hell. Those two men disappeared into the desert in an old buggy. I was unconscious. By the time I came around enough to insist upon trackers following them, the damned desert had drifted sand and silt into the tracks until they couldn't be followed.

"Then I heard that you could follow a track, sometimes when it was months old, and I tried to get you. You had gone, slipped through my fingers. I saw you again this afternoon, and was going to tell you my story when the one man for whom I have been waiting came in. I tried to get the information I wanted from him. He spotted me, somehow. I came to your camp to wait for you. The border men told me where it was. He followed me. You know the rest.

"That's the justice of the desert you

prate so much about! My husband was intrusted with a big shipment of gold. We had only been married three months. Three men took it from him, but under such circumstances that he was held responsible. Those three men came to the border and buried the gold. One sneaked out and changed the hiding place and rushed to Mexicali. The others followed him, found him, demanded an accounting. They went to the hiding place, but I couldn't follow because they had spotted me—I was unconscious, knocked down with a blow, nearly killed with a bullet.

"Those men disappeared. Then the third started to follow the cold trail. He traced them to Mexicali. Then he traced them in this direction. He has some information I haven't got. And he didn't want me to see you.

"Now they have all slipped through my hands. I'll never be able to establish John's innocence. I've given everything, thrown all I had into the gamble, trying to save my husband from prison. He got a jolt of fifteen years! Think of it! Fifteen years!"

I looked at her eyes, rimmed with moisture, blazing with hatred. My mind went back to that night in Mexicali when the team had gone out into the night at a gallop, carrying the two men.

"It had been raining," I muttered.

"What? When?"

"The night they took the buggy and went into the desert."

"Yes!" she snapped. "It had been raining, but it cleared up and the wind came up, and the ground dried almost immediately, and drifted over the tracks. A week later the best tracker in the border country couldn't follow the tracks."

I looked at the moon, then I thought for a moment, not daring to raise her hopes too high.

"We'll go to Yuma. We can get a car there. It'll be an hour's ride on the burro," I said.

"Why should I go to Yuma?"

"Because the desert is getting ready to show you its justice," I told her.

SHE rode to Yuma with me. The trip was mostly in silence. At

Yuma I got a man to drive us to the place where the team had been found, northeast of Holtville. I knew a man that had a ranch near there. I got saddle stock from him. By midnight we were out on horseback, the moon blazing down with a light that turned midnight to day.

I searched for two hours before I found what I wanted. It was in a silty patch where the wind had stretched its legs and swept the ground down to bare crust.

There were two long lines of earth stretching out into the moonlight, some four or five inches high. In between these lines of raised earth were little mushrooms of baked dirt, flat on top, sticking up like flattened door knobs thrust into the ground.

"What are they?" she asked.

I stopped my horse. "You've seen 'dobe houses, made of brick that's nothing but sun-dried mud pressed into shape?"

"Yes."

"You know how well they endure?"

"Yes. They're pretty substantial. Why?"

"Two or three months ago it rained in the desert. Two men started out with a buggy because an automobile couldn't travel over the slippery ground. The wheels of the buggy, the feet of the horses, sank down into the silty mud, pushed it into ruts."

"Well?"

"Then the sun came out. The

ground dried almost instantly and the sand and silt started to drift, and covered up the tracks so they couldn't be followed."

Her voice was impatient as she spat another question at me.

"Well, what's the answer?"

"But the pressure of the wheels and the feet of the horses pushed the silt into a hard mud. The sun baked it into 'dobe. Then the winds blew for several weeks, and in places all the light stuff was blown away. The tracks that had become invisible became visible again, not as ruts sunk into the ground, but as ridges, high above the loose stuff that had blown away."

I could see her eyes glitter with black interest under the silvery moonlight.

"These are the tracks of the buggy?"

"These are the tracks of *a* buggy driven about that time, when the ground was wet, and with two horses."

She sighed, a peculiar, tremulous sigh.

"Let's go," she said.

We rode on, following the tracks as best we could. We could only pick them up in the silty spots where the wind had blown. But the buggy was going straight when those tracks were made, evidently piloted toward some star or natural landmark which had showed in the moonlight.

IT was nearly daylight when we came to the place where the buggy had stopped. Here were crisscross ridges of earth, miscellaneous mushrooms of 'dobe.

"The rig stopped here for a long time," I told her. "Then, when it went away it took an aimless course as though there was no driver."

She nodded.

I poked around in a sand drift. A bit of bone caught my eye. I scooped

away the sand. The body, what was left of it, was that of Sam Slade. The girl wasted no time in exclamations or hysterics. She joined me in getting the sand away, and in making another search. We found Pete Lucas just as the sun went up.

There was a paper in the sand near where Slade's hand had been. It was scrawled, blotched with red stains, but it told the story:

Lucas, Carl Flint and me held up John Lorne of a big gold shipment. I sneaked the gold from the other two and buried it here. Peter Lucas found me. I offered to split fifty fifty. He agreed. Lorne's wife had us spotted and made a gun play. We beat it out here in a rig. Lucas found where the gold was and ambushed me, but I managed to get him even after he shot me in the back. I tried to get into the rig, but the horses got frightened and ran away. The desert is killing me. God, it's hot! Lorne is innocent. The gold is . . .

The scrawl became unintelligible.

I looked from the note to the sand hills, red in the rays of the newly risen sun. It took me a few minutes to spot the handle of a shovel. I dug it out of the drifting sand. After that it was easy. The gold was there. I had it uncovered and before her within half an hour.

Tears streamed down her face. The sun had turned from a red ball to a white-hot disk. The heat rays were shimmering over the desert.

"I'm sorry, I—"

There came the sound of something ripping through the air, the plunk of a high-power bullet striking a sand bank. Powdery sand scattered over us both. The bullet had gone directly between us, a space of inches. A second later there came the sound of a thin, spiteful crack. The sort of noise smokeless

powder makes in the heat of the desert. I flung her down against the sand. Another bullet zipped past my arm. A third threw sand in my face. I dug a trench, after a fashion, and got out my old shiny forty-five from its shoulder holster. Not much good against a rifle.

He came on then, charging, the windshield of his automobile down, his rifle clattering a volley. Breastworks or trenches were no good now. He was going forty miles an hour toward our flank. I ran to one side so he'd concentrate his fire on me, and give the girl a chance. My old forty-five belated an answer.

The automobile gave him the advantage of quick motion. But it's hard to shoot from a moving car, harder to shoot a rifle than a revolver. And the old forty-five has accounted for many a rabbit on the run.

I saw dust flick from the shoulder of his coat, saw the hand drop, the arm straighten. The gun slid down, hit the windshield support. He grabbed for it with his other hand, and the wheels went into a skid. The rifle struck the ground and went end over end. He slammed on the brakes, but I was running forward.

He took in the situation with a swift glance, and did the only thing available. He stepped on the throttle. I fired twice to stop him, trying to find a rear tire, but he rounded a sand hill and got away.

THE girl came to me. We picked up the rifle.

"He must have either followed us, or else had some tip we didn't know anything about."

She nodded. "But we have the gold, and Slade's confession!" Her voice showed how she felt.

I rigged a pack on my saddle and walked, leading the horse, carrying the rifle. The girl rode the other horse. The olive eyes gleamed with a deep light.

"To think that those marks would come to light after weeks!"

I couldn't resist the opportunity for a crack.

"Desert justice," I said.

And she nodded, looked out at the shimmering waste of sand, out where the horizons danced in the heat, and the mirages chased each other in a game of ripple-tag.

We got to Holtville, made a report, and organized a posse to track down Carl Flint, the flabby man with the cold eyes. It was two days before they found him. One of my bullets had punctured his gasoline tank. He'd abandoned the automobile and tried to make it for Yuma. His way lay across drifting sand hills. He hadn't made it.

The girl was to leave that night, to join her husband. The Governor had issued a pardon. The gold had been restored to its owners. There was a matter of a reward, almost five thousand dollars.

"It's yours, Bob Zane."

I shook my head. "You stayed with it, did the work. It's yours."

"No. We'll split it."

I shook my head again. "The desert keeps me supplied. You and your husband will need it."

We sat around my camp fire. Fifteen minutes and she would go toward town to take her train. The reward was all that remained, and I wouldn't change my attitude on that.

The wind came up and the sand rustled softly against the sage. She listened to it.

"The desert!" she breathed, and her voice was soft with emotion.

I thought of the three men who had robbed and cheated, and gone to the desert, of the girl who had followed, of the desert justice of the tracks that stuck in the air, the three bodies buried in the sand hills. It was the drifting sand, the whispering sand, the shifting desert that had lured them to their doom, betrayed them at the last, covered their bodies.

It was a pleasant reverie. Was the sand telling the sage about it? Had it whispered its judgment in the ears of the dying men before they had succumbed to the sentence of doom which had been pronounced?

And then, abruptly, two arms were around my neck. My startled lips felt the clinging caress of warm, moist lips.

There was moisture on my cheek where a tear-stained cheek pressed against it—and she was gone.

I listened to her feet as they crunched into the soft sand as she walked away, toward civilization, toward the train that would take her to her waiting husband—and I knew then that John Lorne was a lucky man.

The sound of the steps died away. The wind freshened, and the desert whispered soothingly to my tired ears, little sand whispers that didn't make sense, but vaguely stirred and soothed. And then the swirling sand, eddying against a dead sage, seemed to hiss the words "Desert jussstice," and I nodded affirmation.

The desert is a wise mother when you know her ways.

THE END.



Fireflies for Flashlights

THE idea of using a mass of fireflies to furnish light has often occurred to children's minds, and been mocked by parents, yet the uncivilized African Negroes have actually achieved such a result.

The natives hollow out a coconut shell or section of some softwood tree, until the sides are very thin, after which they "bait" the fire gourd with the sap of a plant which lures the fireflies, by rubbing the inside of it with the solution. They then perforate the gourd with thousands of holes, so small that the insects cannot crawl through them. The covers of the gourds are left off, to allow the insects to enter the interior, which they do in great numbers. Once within the shell, they adhere to the sides during the night. A number of these gourds, hung in the native *kraals* in an inverted position, give a constant even though dim light during the hours of darkness.

Because so little is known of either of them, the "fire gourd" is often confused with the "fire box," a product of the northern New Guinea natives for the purpose of making fire. This is a hollow bamboo tube filled with tinder and a piece of china or other hard substance, capped over by a piece of bark to make it waterproof. To make fire, the native simply holds a bit of tinder and the china in his left hand, and strikes the china a glancing blow with the edge of the bamboo tube, causing a spark which ignites the tinder. Though apparently difficult, this feat is easy to master, and it may be said that the native can produce a flame with his "fire box" faster than the white man can with his cigarette lighter.

Robert F. Bailey.

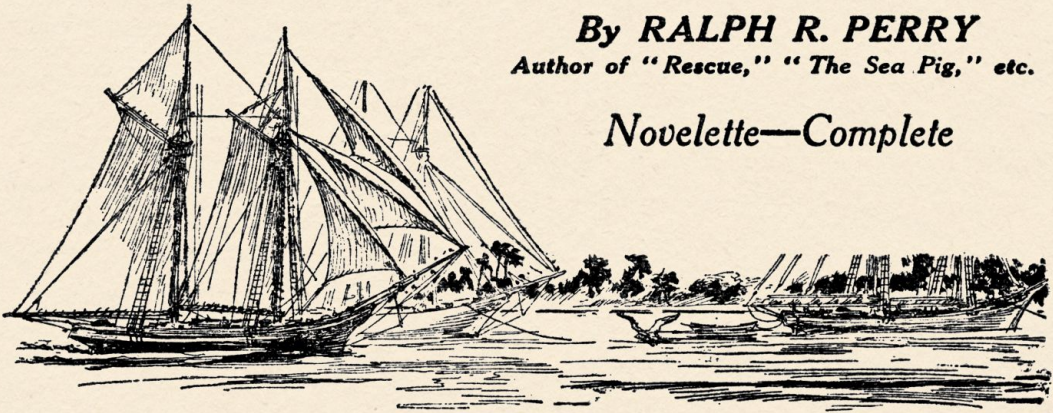
Man's Way

*Pearls were the smallest of the prizes at stake on a South Seas
isle of hatred and heroism, where Bellow Bill
Williams battled for a doomed girl*

By RALPH R. PERRY

Author of "Rescue," "The Sea Pig," etc.

Novelette—Complete



A fourth schooner was heading toward that same anchorage

CHAPTER I.

THE LONE ATOLL.

IN an immensity of sky and sea, colored blue and gold by the setting sun, lay one small atoll. Less than a mile in circumference, nowhere rising higher than ten feet above the surf which begirt it, the ring of white sand fringed with wind-bent coco palms seemed lost in the vastness of the ocean.

In the truest sense the atoll had been lost. The best chart of the South Pacific showed no land there. Far away, at a spot where the water actually rolled deep, the chart did show a tiny dot, marked "existence doubtful." For many, many years no white navigator had considered the task of exploring that lonely, empty sea worth while.

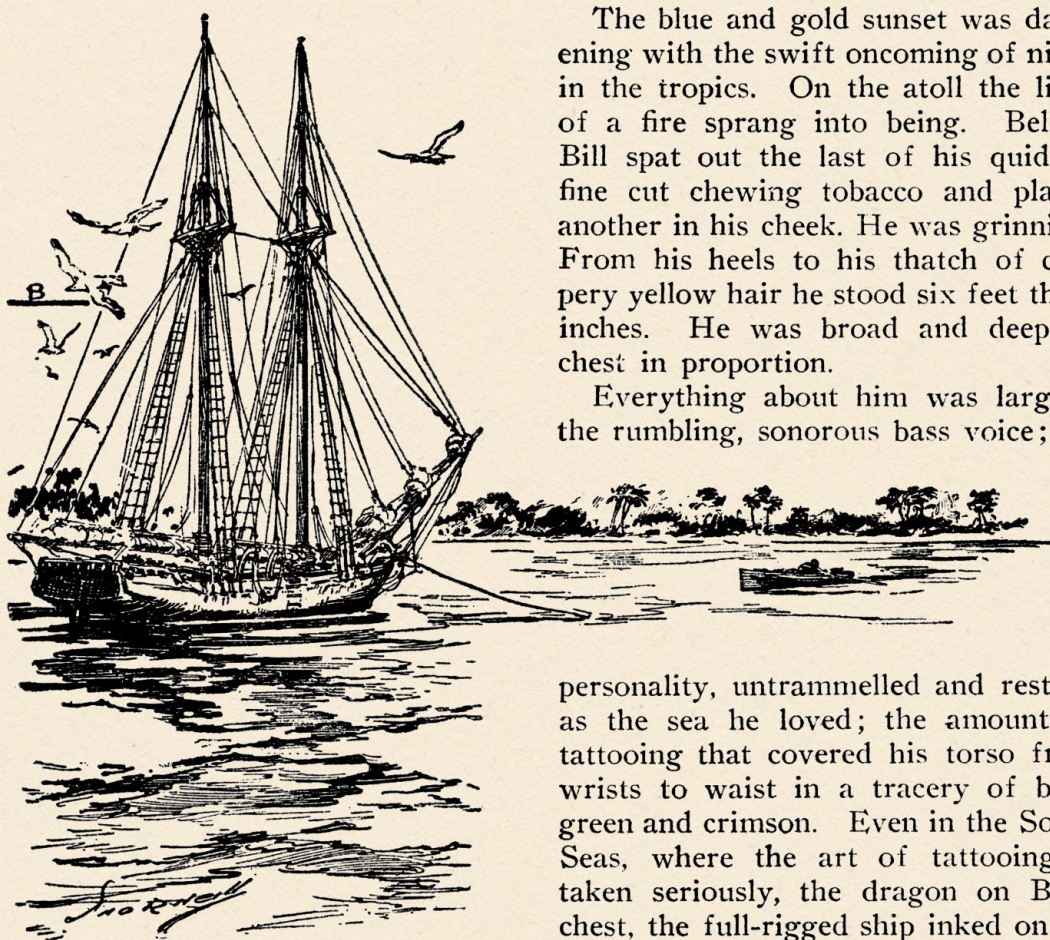
Potentially, the atoll represented the greatest ambition of every pearler in the South Seas—a lagoon where oysters had grown for decades, and no

diver had been to snatch the fattening pearls. As a practical matter, however—did any one know that there was an atoll at all, or whether the lagoon contained shell? Men could employ their time to better advantage elsewhere. And did, until the hint came that in the lost lagoon lay a fortune. Then those who guessed what that fortune was crowded on sail.

One schooner first. Three days later, two more; and now, an hour behind the pair, a fourth schooner charged across the sun-gilded sea toward the same anchorage.

"Bellow Bill" Williams swung his boat into the wind and motioned Kory, his Fijian deck hand, to drop the anchor.

"I win, Kory!" the big tattooed pearler exulted, in a voice that boomed like the surf and was audible through the rattle of the anchor chain. "Here's where that schooner was bound, and it must be pearls that Tivi is after! Trust that smart old Polynesian to be wise to



The blue and gold sunset was darkening with the swift oncoming of night in the tropics. On the atoll the light of a fire sprang into being. Bellow Bill spat out the last of his quid of fine cut chewing tobacco and placed another in his cheek. He was grinning. From his heels to his thatch of coppery yellow hair he stood six feet three inches. He was broad and deep of chest in proportion.

Everything about him was large—the rumbling, sonorous bass voice; his

the native secrets and know more than the government charts! He's had three days to dive, but we'll get our share of the shell that's left, eh, Mop-head?"

The Fijian, however, gave the bristling mop of hair to which Bill had alluded a doleful shake.

"Three fella schooner, massa," he grunted. "One fella schooner belong 'Motopu Mike.' Him bad fella!"

"Motopu Mike's a one-eared, red-bearded old pirate. Cut black fella's throat. Wreck white fella's ship—and there's no law here to cramp his style," rumbled Bill cheerfully. "But—say! What's bothering you, Shag Head? You afraid you can't get our share of the pearls, or I can't keep them?"

personality, untrammelled and restless as the sea he loved; the amount of tattooing that covered his torso from wrists to waist in a tracery of blue, green and crimson. Even in the South Seas, where the art of tattooing is taken seriously, the dragon on Bill's chest, the full-rigged ship inked on his back and the green snake that coiled around his hips, made natives stare.

"You think me weak fella?" he chuckled. "You stay along boat. Watch out like seven bells for Motopu Mike. I go ashore alone, savvy?" He moved toward the boat, his big face becoming grave. The presence of as thorough-going a reprobate as the South Seas could boast worried him not at all, but finding three schooners where he expected one complicated a situation already puzzling enough.

NO native with the wisdom and the excellent reputation which Tivi enjoyed would have deliberately allowed Motopu Mike to get wind of an unfished pearl bed. The second

schooner was Japanese, by her rig. That was almost as bad; Japs come to the South Seas to make money quickly, and are fighting men.

Tivi of Raratonga was not. He was strong as a killer whale. No one ever faced the dangers on or below the surface of the sea more bravely. But he was a Polynesian—a race that has not been allowed to fight nor possess modern weapons for generations. Bill admired and respected Tivi. Though nearing sixty, with hair that had begun to turn gray, the Polynesian could still pick a pearl oyster from the bottom in twenty fathoms.

Wise in the old lore of the South Seas, he was also the equal of any white skipper in navigation and seamanship. Among his own people he was a chief; among the whites, the missionaries admired him for his honesty and genuine Christianity, while the traders were forced to respect one who could out-sail, out-trade, and out-venture them. He was a remarkable man. That he would keep this atoll and its pearl bed a secret for years was characteristic. That he should divulge it at the last moment, unthinkable.

Bellow Bill had been able to follow Tivi through luck and his own quick wit. A week before he had met the Polynesian at sea, and noted that Tivi was tacking into the wind, though the breeze was fair for all the ports Bill knew of. The pearler's curiosity was whetted. He looked at the chart, and found the tiny dot marked "existence doubtful." It lay in the direction that Tivi was steering.

Bill could not follow at once. He had passengers aboard whom he had to land, but as soon as he reached port he made inquiries to learn what Tivi was up to. He found that the Polynesian had loaded a cargo of trade goods and

cleared for the Solomon Islands—a logical voyage for a trader at that time of year. But Bill had sighted him steering in the opposite direction! Obviously, then, Tivi meant to keep his real destination a secret.

TIVI had also carried, ostensibly as passengers for the Solomons, a drunken old beach comber who went by the name of "Squareface George" because of his fondness for trade gin, and a girl called Emily, whom gossip declared to be the half-caste daughter of Squareface. On the night of sailing, the father had got very drunk and boasted that he was going to make a fortune for himself and his girl.

The drunkenness and the boasting were both habitual; and if Bill had not been ferreting out secret motives he would have laughed at the statement. Under the circumstances, however, he had sailed as quickly as possible to find the lost atoll. Motopu Mike and the Japanese pearlers must also have taken the drunken babbling of Squareface seriously. Perhaps the beach comber had given them an explicit clew. That was immaterial. The important point was that since they were here, Bill was exceedingly glad he had followed also.

Tivi was a good guy, and more than that, Squareface George had been Bill's friend. Though the beach comber had plumbed the lowest depths to which a man can sink, Bill still owed him a debt of gratitude. That Squareface had been too weak to withstand the temptations of the South Seas was in Bill's eye merely his misfortune. The big pearler remembered the George Masterson who had been a trader years before, and in islands far from those in which Squareface had cadged for drinks.

That George Masterson had had a wife and a daughter named Emily. When Bill had been overturned in the surf near the trading station and badly injured by cuts from poisonous coral, Mrs. Masterson had nursed him through an illness which might otherwise have been fatal. Bill had never forgotten her, nor the little girl who had played with him on the beach.

Later Mrs. Masterson had been caught by a shark while bathing. Grief, as well as a character naturally weak, had sent Masterson to drink and degraded him into Squareface George. In his worst sprees he cared for his daughter as well as he could. He refused to let any one separate them, though he could not help drinking up any money Bill was able to give the girl.

Though the gossip was that Emily was a half-caste, Bill knew the truth. The girl was a brunette, with an oval face and an olive complexion, tanned as dark as a Polynesian. She had lived among natives since she was a child, but she was as white as Bill himself.

If Squareface were making one last effort to give his daughter the position she deserved, Bill was resolved that she should not be robbed of it because her drunken father had blabbed the secret of the atoll to a one-eared pirate and Japanese strangers. Why Squareface had been selected by Tivi to share in the venture Bill could not guess, but whatever the reason, the beach comber was in luck. Any arrangement between them would be fulfilled to the letter by the Polynesian, in case Motopu and the Japs left them anything to divide.

BELLOW BILL rowed ashore with a gun in his coat pocket, and strode determinedly toward the blazing fire. From a distance he could see that seven persons were seated around it.

Squareface, Tivi and Emily were together. Near them were the two Japanese; opposite, Motopu, with a red beard trimmed square just below the chin and a white, nobby scar where the left ear should have been. Beside the pirate was a small, dark, undersized man, Spanish in appearance, presumably Motopu's deck hand.

None of the seven spoke nor moved as Bill approached. He felt unwelcome. With Kory, his arrival increased the population of the atoll to nine—nine who must settle any difficulties among themselves. On this uncharted ring of sand they were in a world of their own.

"Hello, Emily!" Bellow Bill hailed in his deep voice. "Glad to see you. Aye there, Motopu! Ain't seen you since you moved the channel lights and put the Montparnasse on the reef. Neither have the police, and they've been looking harder than me. Is the wrecking business good?"

"Go to the devil!" muttered the pirate in his beard. Bill crossed the fire and shook hands with Tivi.

"You have eaten? I will bring more fish," the Polynesian said hospitably.

"Didn't stop to eat. I could do with a snack," Bill boomed. He pressed the strong brown fingers firmly. "Quite a mob you've got. But you rate choice of the diving ground—as discovered, eh?" he demanded, staring at Motopu and the two Japanese.

"The damn' brown psalm-singer had already stripped the bed to the last shell," growled Motopu. "He's got the gall to tell us he won't divide the pearls! The heck he won't! There's a pile of shell on the beach as high as your waist. Twisted, sick-looking shell like pearls are found in."

Motopu's red beard bristled.

"Tivi's got them hid!" he declared. "Me and Carlos ain't going to sail back with nothing but some stinking shell, we ain't! Divvy up, I say!"

The two Japanese nodded like flat-nosed yellow dolls, and gave a hiss of assent. Tivi had left the fire and was already at the beach, casting a line into the surf. Squareface lifted his bloated countenance.

"You're too late, so you can all get out of here!" he blustered. "We don't want you, none of you!"

"Including me — Masterson?" Bill rumbled, deliberately using the name the beach comber had not heard in years. The man darted him a venomous look.

"Yes, including you!"

"Emily?" the pearler questioned.

"I—I guess you might as well, Bill," the girl answered slowly. "That is, if you'll *all* go."

Bill nodded. For a young woman to live among the kindest of savages was one thing, he reflected; to be left on an atoll in such company quite another. "The shell really has all been lifted, and the pearls well hidden," Emily went on. "When we saw two strange schooners heading for us Tivi thought it best. He hasn't any weapons, you know, and—and—" Her voice faded.

"Yeah, I savvy. The pearls will go to the best scrapper, and nothing's barred," Bill answered cheerfully. The situation was clear enough, and the sooner it was settled, the better.

HE faced Motopu across the fire, the hand over his coat pocket sagging with the weight of a gun.

"Here's what!" he declared in his great voice. "I don't like to sail back with nothing, either, but if there ain't any more pearls, there ain't. That's my hard luck, and yours, too. You

ain't going to pull rough stuff on two unarmed men and a kid. Fight now, or pull your hook. We'll send Tivi after the pearls, and all sail out of here as quick as we can raise anchor. I'll stick with Tivi till I see him safe in port, so you won't pull anything at sea, either."

The red-bearded pirate looked ugly, but Bill was on his feet, ready for trouble. His decision had been immediate, and his intention of settling with the pirate first, however the fight with the other three came out, was evident. Motopu hesitated. In a moment he would have permitted himself to be disarmed, but Squareface broke the tension.

"I won't sail nowhere in your company, Bill!" he snarled.

"Yeah?" boomed the huge pearler, his eyes never leaving his three enemies "You'll do like I tell you!"

From seaward came the rattle of an anchor chain suddenly slipped. Seaman's instinct brought all four sailors to their feet. Bill jerked out his revolver and leaped back, covering the others, but daring a look seaward.

Tivi's figure was no longer visible against the white background of the surf. To Bill's amazement, his own schooner began to swing broadside before the wind and drift out to sea.

"Stay in the firelight, you!" he shouted at Motopu, and backed slowly toward the beach. He could guess what had happened, what must have happened. Tivi had swum out, and been welcomed as a friend by Kory. Once aboard, the Polynesian had overpowered Bill's deck hand, and set the schooner adrift.

But why, with three vessels to choose from, should Tivi have selected his—knowing him to be both honest and friendly and the others the reverse?

For some good reason; some overpowering reason.

The body of a swimmer showed for an instant in the surf. Bill turned and ran toward the beach. The riddle must be answered, and since Tivi was also the one who had hidden the pearls, Squareface and the girl were in no immediate danger from the open war he had initiated with the other three.

CHAPTER II.

GOOD TRICKS WORK TWICE.

BILL'S dash toward the surf was quick enough to enable him to recognize the swimmer as Tivi, not Kory. At his approach the Polynesian dived back through the surf. Bill, who was almost as good a swimmer, followed suit. He discarded his coat, and when his revolver slipped out of the waistband of his trousers, he kicked out of the trousers also in order to keep Tivi in sight. The native was swimming away from the schooners and parallel to the beach; and sprinting his best, Bill slowly lost distance for the first quarter mile of the chase.

Tivi, however, was unable to shake the pearler off. Though he could swim for hours, so could Bill, and halfway around the atoll the superior stamina of the younger man asserted itself. Foot by foot the gap between the two heads and flailing arms began to shorten. At last Tivi seemed to realize that he would finally be caught, for he took advantage of a big sea to ride in to the beach. On the seventh big wave that followed Bill plunged through the combers, and tumbled out on the sand at Tivi's feet.

The Polynesian made no attempt to run. He even reached down and helped Bill to stand, facing him with squared

shoulders but hanging head, like a thoroughbred that has turned back to receive a well-deserved licking.

"Get off this beach. We show up like a pair of black cats against a white-washed wall," said Bill sharply. There was not much cover anywhere on the island, and though the fire was only a dim speck of yellow at the opposite side of the circle of sand, he had no way of knowing where Motopu had gone in the meantime.

"Are you crazy, Tivi?" he growled when he had pushed the native into the partial concealment of a clump of pandanus. "If you've hurt Kory I'll break your neck!"

"He is not hurt. I tied him. He will untie my knots before the schooner drifts far. There are no reefs to wreck it," answered the Polynesian sulkily, in the vernacular.

"But, you fool! I can't leave a schooner knocking around the South Pacific!" Bill grunted. "Blue blazing damnation, what was the idea?"

"You had a boat. You could have caught the schooner if you had rowed after it."

"Maybe I could, though I'd have had to row all night, on account of the breeze. I'd have been out of the picture here for quite some time. Long enough for the pearls to be recovered, and for every one to skip!" Bill boomed indignantly. "So you wanted to be rid of me! Do you think I'd steal your pearls?"

Tivi shook a grizzled, curly head.

"But Motopu would?"

"Can't find pearls," grumbled Tivi.

YOU underestimate that guy. He's a hold-over from the days of Bully Hayes. He'd use torture as quick as he'd cut your throat—and that's practically instantaneous."

"I am not afraid."

"Who cares? It's pearls we're talking about! I want you to keep what's rightfully yours, but by blue blazing damnation, you might help yourself a little, too!" Bill was exasperated. "Kory can squirm out of ropes like an eel. I'll let what you did to him pass," he went on. "You've gummed the deal, but I'm trying to be your friend, and Squareface's friend, not that he's worth it. Emily is worth the lot of you."

"You savvy?" Bellow Bill demanded, when Tivi did not respond. "I'm going to help you whether you like it or not. I'll hold off Motopu till you get the pearls, and then the four of us will sail in your schooner back to Thursday Island. We'll pick up Kory at sea and you can sail my boat back. We'll start right now, too. I got a living to make and can't fool around."

Tivi shook his head. His shoulders squared in dogged refusal.

"I don't want to act rough, but what I'll do to you ain't a circumstance to what you'd get from the others," Bill threatened. "That plan is the only one that will get you out, and if you didn't have some crazy notion in your head you'd see it. What's your objection?"

"Squareface is not honest. He would cheat me. I would lose the pearls rather than be cheated." The Polynesian sighed. "They are big pearls. You could not hold them all in one hand."

"Squareface isn't anything that's decent these days, and you knew that when you brought him along," snapped Bill, brushing the excuse to one side. "You leave him to me, too. Now, where are those pearls?"

Tivi shook his head.

"I'm going to find out if I have to kill you. We've got to get them before Motopu and those Japs get organized. Right now they are between us and your boats. Where—are—those—pearls?"

The grizzled head gave a stubborn shake.

ONCE a Polynesian has made up his mind, the best arguments are futile. Bellow Bill shrugged and struck a short, clean blow to the point of the brown jaw, that stretched Tivi on the sand, dazed and momentarily helpless. Bill knelt on the broad brown chest. He hated what he was doing, was able to do it only because he was certain that it was for the good of every one involved. Slowly his fingers closed on Tivi's throat.

"The pearls, Tivi!" Bill rumbled. "Give in, man—I don't want to hurt you!"

There was no answer but a desperate struggle. As a surgeon holds a refractory patient quiet beneath the knife, Bill pinned Tivi to the sand and tightened his grip. The brown face turned purple, and then black. The body under Bill's knees went limp. He rose, lest he should kill the native, waited till consciousness returned, and then gripped Tivi's throat again.

Too weak to struggle now, the Polynesian still shook his head. He would not speak, though he died.

Bill gave up. He felt half sick and thoroughly ashamed of himself. The native had too much passive courage. Had he yielded, a quick end to the situation might have been possible; as he had not, Bill was puzzled both as to the native's motive and his own best course of action.

He rose and went to the beach, bringing back salt water which he

flipped in Tivi's face until the broad brown chest began to rise and fall normally. At the camp on the opposite side of the atoll a lantern was moving away from the fire. Evidently Motopu had decided to make a search for Tivi and Bill.

That the forces against him were divided was the first lucky break the big pearler had obtained since landing on the atoll. He much regretted the loss of his revolver in the surf, however, for even with his enemies separated he could expect to encounter two well-armed men in either party. But with a club he could at least attack in silence. Bellow Bill grinned; he enjoyed odds.

Tivi he dragged deeper into the pandanus thicket. The native would be found if the search were conducted with any care, but the partial concealment would gain Bill time and increase the distance between his enemies, which was what he wanted.

ARMING himself with a billet of driftwood found on the beach, he hastened toward the camp fire, choosing the side of the atoll opposite to that on which the lantern moved, in order to avoid the oncoming party. In ten minutes, for the distance was less than half a mile, he was close to the original camp. A big fire was blazing in front of a shelter built of palm leaves and sail cloth. The hut threw a dark band of shadow across the sand, and along this Bill squirmed, belly down on the warm sand, until he could part the leaves that formed the rear of the hut and look out through the low doorway.

The two Japanese—men, like all their race, of some military service—were on guard. Both sat cross-legged. They had placed themselves at opposite

sides of the fire and well back from its light, so that they were separated by fully thirty feet. The butt of a revolver and the hilt of a heavy diver's knife was visible in each waistband.

Between them, close to the fire, sat Emily, whom they were guarding as their hostage. Motopu and his man Carlos were gone, and had taken Squareface with them. Naturally, the Japs supposed that Bill was still armed. The tactics they had adopted were evidence of their fatalism and courage, since both were exposed to a shot from long range. On the other hand, even if Bill had been an expert marksman he could not have disabled more than one of the two before the other leaped out of the firelight; and since, unarmed, he must come hand to hand, their position gave him a hard nut to crack.

Attack he must. There would never be a better opportunity to get Emily into a place of comparative safety, and when a chance had to be taken Bill's question was "Why wait?" Accurate shooting by firelight isn't so simple. And he would have about forty feet to charge; he could be within club swing in something less than two seconds.

Like a sprinter Bill crouched, and filled his big left hand with gritty sand. Then he rushed—so suddenly, so swiftly that Emily uttered a shrill, piercing scream of surprise and terror. Instinctively the nearest Jap jumped to his feet before drawing the revolver.

No error could have been worse. As he jerked the weapon clear Bill was on him. The handful of sand lashed against the Jap's eyes, confusing his aim. Though he fired, the bullet missed. Bill's club came down with a hollow *clump* on the cropped black head. The Jap dropped in a heap, and Bill sprang upon the unconscious figure, throwing

his club aside and rolling over and over on the sand with the little brown man gripped tight in his huge arms.

Gun poised, the second Japanese waited for a fair shot. At that moment a bullet would have been as likely to kill his friend as Bill. Again Emily screamed. Bill was up. He held a limp body before his chest. Behind that shield he charged toward the second revolver. There was a shot. Too high, however. The Jap meant it to go high, to intimidate rather than wound, for he flung his revolver down and jerked out his knife as Bill reached him.

The pearler hurled the limp body at the smaller man's head. Agilely the Jap dodged, but he could not avoid Bill's flying tackle in the wake of his human missile. One tattooed arm closed around the Jap's knee, bringing him to the ground. The knife flew into the air. For a second the two wrestled. Jujutsu was no match for greater weight and long experience in rough-and-tumble. A tattooed fist rose and fell—once. The fight ended. Bellow Bill rose, breathing heavily, and grinned at the girl.

"Shouldn't have screamed, Emily," he reproved. "Look alive, now, and bring me an ax. I want to smash up all the boats but mine."

"There's another boat Tivi used to dive from, way up the lagoon!"

"Well, we'll have to let that one go," the pearler grinned. He was picking up the two revolvers. With one of the captured knives he cut long strips of canvas from the sailcloth shelter, and bound the two unconscious Japanese hand and foot. Dragging a man under each arm he ran to the beach, Emily following with a hatchet that had been brought ashore to open coconuts.

Faintly Bill heard Motopu shout.

Far down the island the lantern was being swung in wide circles, as though signalling.

"Well, your screaming didn't tell him any more than the shots," Bill rumbled to Emily. "Don't blame yourself, kid. Only you damn near made me jump out of my skin. A woman's scream will paralyze most anything for a second or two . . . Get the oars out of the boats; no use wasting good gear."

A dozen blows with the hatchet left gaping holes in the Japs' boat, and Motopu's. Bill shoved his own into the surf with Emily and his two prisoners aboard, caught the back wash of a big sea, and was at the oars before the next wave could swamp him. Once outside the double line of surf he rested, chuckling. "If Motopu had fought in the war, instead of spending 1918 robbing poor brown pearl divers while most of the gunboats was away, he'd know the importance of guarding a way of retreat," he commented cheerfully. "He won't want to be marooned on a lost atoll. Not much. He'll turn honest . . . So now that we're top dog, Emily, tell me—why would Tivi rather let me kill him than tell where he hid the pearls? He knows I'm no thief."

The girl hung her dark head. "I—mustn't. I don't dare," she refused flatly.

CHAPTER III.

THE BARGAIN.

BILL rowed beyond revolver range. Close to the Japanese schooner he shipped his oars and faced the girl. The boat rolled heavily. The two men rolled back and forth across the bottom boards. Darkness was around

them. In the stern Emily seemed to have withdrawn.

"Scared?" said Bill gently, in his deep voice. "We built sand forts ten years ago, Emily, when you were eight. And I got starfish out of the lagoon to man them, do you remember?—while you skedaddled up and down the beach for seaweed and bits of shells to make them pretty. I mean no more harm now than I did then, kid. How can you be scared of me?"

The girl was silent. The lack of confidence hurt Bill. He shrugged in his discomfiture.

"I'm beginning to put two and two together, kid," he warned. "Don't be stubborn like Tivi. Where are the pearls?"

"I don't know."

"That's a lie, Emily. You saw them hid. You must have, on this bare atoll. But let that pass. Who knew of this atoll? Your father, or Tivi?"

"Tivi."

"Naturally, he would. I'm glad you told the truth there," said Bill gravely. "Look here, Emily. Two and two make four, though I'm sorry to add the sum. Why did you promise to marry Tivi?"

The dark head, previously bent low, lifted bravely.

"My father gets worse every year. Decent white men won't speak to him any more. Except you. You're our only old friend, and you see us seldom. Father is getting worse than a native. But with money held in trust he could go back to the States. I'm not a fool, Bill, but I know he would live decently among his own kind."

"Yeah. And you'd live as Tivi's wife. Emily, it's all right to love your father, but—" Bill paused.

"Tivi's a good man! A kind man, and he loves me. More than any man

I've ever met loves me!" the girl cried vehemently.

"No one denies that, but—"

"I knew you wouldn't like it. That's why we were afraid of you—all of us, more than we feared Motopu. But, Bill! I've got to take care of my father, and what else can I do? You know I'm thought to be a half-caste. How can I help my father unless I marry, and who can I marry but a white man that's no account—or a native? Tivi can trace his ancestry back sixty generations, all chiefs. He's a man, Bill. I'm—rather fond of him. I could do worse!"

"Squareface couldn't," rumbled the big pearler. "You're thinking of him. He agreed to the marriage on condition that Tivi turned the pearls over to him, eh?"

"The atoll has been a secret passed from father to son in Tivi's family for generations. The bed was small, but it was very rich, Bill." The girl's chin set stubbornly. "I'm going to save my father, Bill, and you needn't think you can stop it. I'm of age, and my mind's made up."

"Back on Thursday Island I could not stop you," Bill admitted. "Don't argue, Emily. I've nothing against Tivi, but you shan't throw yourself away. I've played with you when you were a kid, and you're not going to make any bargain for the sake of a drunken . . ." Bill's fists were clenched in impotent rage.

"Squareface is your father. I won't call him his proper names. However, this changes my plans. I could wait Motopu out if the pearls just meant so much money, but since they're part of a bargain . . ." Bill shook his curly head. "Where are they? Don't lie, now."

"Tivi wrapped them in cloth and

sank them in the lagoon in deep water. He said nobody but he could get them."

"What's deep water to a man in a diving suit or a good diver?" Bill grumbled.

"There's something more than the depth," the girl insisted. "Of course, the cloth could be seen by using a water-glass."

BILL picked up the oars and drove the boat against the Jap schooner.

He tossed the two prisoners on deck, and went below. He reappeared in a minute, walked forward, and slipped the anchor chain. The schooner began to drift before the wind that blew over the atoll, as his own schooner had. Bill swung himself back in the boat and rowed toward Tivi's schooner.

"The Japs will free themselves in time, just as Kory will," he remarked to the girl. "For the time being they're out of the picture. Now, I'm going to put you aboard your boat, and lead the main halyards to the windlass so that you can hoist sail. You can slip the cable and get under way alone, can't you?"

The girl nodded.

"I'll leave you the skiff, so you'll have plenty of time before Motopu can swim out or get the other boat back from the lagoon," Bill instructed. "If you see him coming, get out of the way. Sail before the wind till you sight some ship or island, and then make distress signals. Whatever happens, you've got to be safe, Emily. You'll promise to do that?"

"If necessary," said the girl stiffly. Bill helped her to the deck of her own schooner, and tied the painter.

Ashore, the lantern had returned to the main camp; he could see two figures moving about and two more lying near the blaze. Motopu had evidently caught

Tivi. The one-eared pirate had not come to the beach. The rattling of the anchor had evidently informed him, if the shots had not, that Bill had become the master at sea.

One of the small black figures outlined against the firelight picked a blazing stick from the flames. A second later the two on the schooner heard a yell of terror.

Emily caught Bellow Bill's arm. "Father—" she began.

"Squareface is frightened — not hurt," said Bill. "Motopu's finding out where the pearls are hid. That father of yours will tell all he knows before he'll let a hair be singed. Don't worry, kid. He ain't like you or Tivi. Number One is his only thought. Remember now, you've promised to slip the cable if you see me getting the worst of things."

BEFORE the girl could protest Bill dived overboard and swam to Motopu's schooner. As he climbed the rail he noted that the group by the fire had broken up. Evidently the mere threat of torture had been sufficient, and Motopu had learned of the pearls. Bill crammed a handful of water-soaked fine-cut into his cheek and spat vigorously till he had got rid of the taste of salt.

Already, aboard the Japanese schooner, he had cut the diving suit into ribbons and broken the air pumps. Now, at his leisure, he destroyed Motopu's diving equipment also. When he finished nothing remained intact but the heavy copper helmet.

Bill turned his quid ruefully. By destroying the equipment he had practically made Tivi's boast good. To hide the pearls in deep water, where they could be seen and recovered by divers, seemed to him an aberration on

the part of a man usually astute. It was the native blood in Tivi coming out. No white man would have been so childish.

Yet, without gear, neither Motopu nor Carlos had the strength and skill to swim into the depths for the loot, and Bill doubted if they could force Tivi to be their cat's-paw. Any torture extreme enough to break Tivi's will would incapacitate him for the descent.

Bill doubted whether he could make such a dive himself. He had the strength and the skill in the water, yet the pressure on a diver at twenty fathoms amounts to more than seven thousand pounds to the square foot, and he lacked the practice in holding his breath and handling himself at great depths which native pearl divers receive from boyhood.

However, between diving alone, and diving in a suit with Squareface, Tivi or even Emily handling the air pump, Bill preferred the former. Emily loved her father with an intensity that even welcomed the prospect of a lifetime of sneers for herself, in order that his last years might be passed in such respect as civilization gives the drunkard who has sufficient income to support his vice.

She was against Bill no less than was Tivi or Motopu; and though she was actuated by the highest motives, the big tattooed pearler was determined to save her from the consequences of her own courageous folly.

On shore the red-bearded pirate and his lean Spanish associate were getting the boat across from the lagoon to the seaward side. Bill dried off the revolvers he had taken from the Japs and waited the attack. The irony of the situation amused him. Motopu Mike was going to fight, at a disadvantage,

for broken gear which would be useless to him if he won.

CHAPTER IV.

MANHOOD—POLYNESIAN STYLE.

MOTOPU placed Squareface and Tivi in the bow of the boat.

Once through the breakers he propped up the two bound men like a breastwork and lay down behind them. Carlos also lay down, sculling the boat with one oar.

As the boat drew near, Bill had no target but his friends; and the red-bearded pirate did not make the mistake of trying to board. The boat sculled round and round the schooner, tempting Bill to open fire, which Bill refused to do. He was no more than an average marksman with a revolver. In the dark he would be likely to hit the wrong man, and Motopu, firing at his flash, far more likely to center an effective bullet. Even in the act of boarding, Motopu would still be one of a group; while Bill would be silhouetted against the night sky if he attempted to defend the schooner's rail.

Cheerfully Bill gave the one-eared old roughneck credit for a level head; equally cheerfully he crawled across the deck, bent low to prevent his withdrawal from being observed, and returned to the cabin in which the diving gear had been stowed. Bill's idea was to stand in ambush behind the door, but he found he was far too deep-chested for such a narrow hiding place. Instead, he hooked the door open and set his back against the bulkhead opposite. Though he stood in absolute darkness, he could follow Motopu's movements by the sound.

First there was the thump of the boat's bow against the schooner side.

There followed the rapid slither of bare feet across the planking above Bill's head as Motopu and Carlos searched the deck, and then a whisper:

"Did he stay on the other boat?"

"*Quién sabe?*"

"Hoist them two on deck and then stand by the companionway while I have a look below," Motopu growled. "I don't fancy looking for Bill."

Nevertheless, the one-eared man did not hesitate. The light of a flash danced down the companionway steps and was extinguished. In the dark Motopu leaped from the deck above. For a moment he stood still—Bill could hear the panting intake of his breath—then Motopu fired two quick shots. The flashlight snapped on and off, quick as a flash of summer lightning. Motopu was in the room opposite to the one in which Bill waited. Before entering he had searched the room with bullets fired around the door jamb.

Bill leaped away from the bulkhead against which he leaned as though the planking had suddenly turned red-hot. In the center of the room he crouched, a-tingle with the keen thrill of excitement and danger. A barrage of revolver bullets was something he hadn't counted on. He guessed that Carlos was at the top of the companionway stairs, with another flash and a gun. The passageway commanded from the stairs would be no place for a hand-to-hand struggle.

He waited for Motopu to sweep the second room with lead. If he were hit—well, he doubted whether one bullet could stop him.

Streaks of flame stabbed from the doorway. Headlong, Bill dived below the gun flashes. His shoulders struck Motopu's legs, bringing him to the floor. Blindly the big pearler pummelled a wrestling body with fist and

gun butt. A gun exploded near his face. There was a shot from the companionway and a bullet ripped into the planks beyond his head. Then Bill's gun butt thudded on bone. Motopu's struggles ceased, and the pearler dragged him back into the room, then struck a match.

"Mike!" yelled Carlos from the deck above.

"Mike ain't got nothing to say!" Bill bellowed recklessly. There was a gash in the red-bearded pirate's forehead, and he was completely out. Bill tied him with strips of the diving suit, and bound up the injured head. Motopu would live. There remained Carlos, who had dodged back from the companionway at the sound of the pearler's voice, and who now lighted a lantern and set it on the deck where it flooded the hatchway with light.

BILL didn't like the idea of lifting his head into the open, but he was afraid that if he delayed Carlos might row over to Tivi's schooner, and force Emily to set sail. He grabbed up the copper diving helmet, put it on his curly head, and promptly took it off. He couldn't see anything through the thick eyeglasses, and the copper plate would offer little resistance.

Nevertheless, the thing might draw a shot, and luckily the lantern was set close to the companionway. Standing beneath the opening, Bill lifted the helmet slowly on the end of a boat hook.

The copper dome was scarcely raised above the deck level when a revolver crashed, up forward, and a bullet ripped through it, knocking it from Bill's hands. At the shot Bill straightened up. His own bullet smashed the lantern to bits, and as the light winked out he flung himself up the steps and onto the deck, rolling behind the wheel.

A bullet zipped over his head, knocking a spoke to splinters. Bill fired at the flash that leaped from behind the mainmast. Dimly he could see Carlos against the lighter sky, crouching, his revolver spitting fire. Bill shot at the orange streaks that stabbed at him; kept on shooting till his gun clicked on an empty shell, though the mast spat flame no more. With his gun empty, the big pearler charged before Carlos should be able to reload. The whole exchange of shots had not lasted two seconds. Unhit himself, he was sure that Carlos was also uninjured.

Yet as he leaped forward the dark body crouched at the foot of the mast did not move. Bill caught a lean shoulder and jerked the little Spaniard up, raising his revolver barrel to strike.

Black eyes, wide open, stared back at him unseeing. The lean face wobbled and dropped against the scrawny chest. Only then Bill noticed the stain spreading through the singlet from a wound halfway between the base of the throat and the left armpit. The severed artery pumped blood in a stream. A rattle sounded in the Spaniard's throat. He was dead before Bill could lower him to the deck.

To the suddenness of gunplay Bill could never get accustomed. He felt dazed. His ears still rang to the booming of the shots; his right hand stung from the backspit of his revolver, and yet here was Carlos dead, and the fight over. Mechanically he stuffed fine-cut into his cheek, laid the Spaniard down and closed his eyes, and then walked heavily to the rail.

SQUAREFACE and Tivi were tumbled in a heap on the deck where Motopu had dropped them after lifting them over the rail to act as a shield. Bill dragged the Polyne-

sian clear, and somewhat more roughly propped Squareface against the rail.

"You're a complete skunk, Master-son," he boomed, stripping away the gags that kept both men silent. "A father that'll take advantage of a daughter's love for him is— But what is the use of talking? I respected you once because you kept her with you when I'd have brought her up as she deserved. Did you have this planned all the time?"

"No. It was Tivi's idea," whined the beach comber. "Come, Bill, untie me!"

"Untie, nothing! Not until morning, when I've got the pearls."

"My brother is angry. I do not understand," said Tivi gently in the liquid speech of the South Seas. "Why should I not marry? I am not poor, and that is what the white men fear. I am a widower; I built the church for the minister who will marry us. Many white men have married the girls of my family."

"We needn't discuss it," Bill rumbled. He was sorry for the big brown man, for the bewilderment on Tivi's face was like that of a puzzled child.

"But why? Our Lord Jesus held all men alike. He made fishermen and publicans His disciples," Tivi went on with simple dignity. "Does my brother think I am not enough of a man? That I am weak, or a coward? I am trying to do all things as a white man."

"Nothing against you personally. When I've got the pearls and we're back in civilization you can ask Emily again." Bill knew he was taking the right stand, and yet Tivi was putting him in the wrong. There was nothing against the Polynesian personally. If the Polynesian's name had only been

Smith, if he had only been born north of the Equator!

"Only I can get the pearls," said Tivi decisively. "Am I a child, Below Bill, to drop a fortune under a diver's nose if any man could recover it? Only a chief can bring them to the air again. Aye, in the old days we of Raratonga chose our chiefs by that test, among others. You will not dive, Bill."

"I think I can make bottom in twenty fathoms."

Awkwardly because of his bound arms the Polynesian shrugged that feat aside as a simple matter, which it was to him or any good diver of his race.

"But I dropped the pearls beside the hole of a conger eel," Tivi warned. "Not even I could get the pearls without being bitten, and to win free takes a man. Almost I was caught while gathering the shell. When I saw the schooners come, I swam down, dropped the pearls near its hole. I am not afraid of the teeth."

"Eels don't scare me, either," Bill rumbled nonchalantly. That was true. Yet of the three great dangers which the diver for pearls must face—the shark, which is not hard to fight off; the huge *tonu*, which has head and jaws large enough to take a diver's whole body, but which is sluggish and easy to avoid; and the conger eel, which strikes more quickly and surely than the shark, and from which the one method of escape is an acid test of muscle and nerve—the eel is most greatly dreaded by divers.

"Then you are a man, too, brother," said Tivi gravely. "This is not a small eel, but a grandfather. I will go down, to-morrow, with you to watch. When I rise you can take the pearls from me, for I will be weak."

"You go, after hinting I'm afraid? Not much!" Bill boomed. "Rest easy, you two, while I put Motopu in irons and get some sleep."

THERE was, however, very little sleep that night for the tattooed pearler. He had, first, to swim to the other schooner and reassure Emily as to the outcome of the fight. He returned with the skiff, for he wanted to keep the girl away from her father. Of course, she could swim the distance between the schooners while he was absent at the lagoon; on that account he searched Mike's craft carefully for handcuffs.

He found almost everything else—a stand of half a dozen Winchesters, which he threw overboard, a box of dynamite and detonating caps, forty per cent stuff used for fishing or defense against natives, several half barrels of contraband liquor and other appliances of a schooner captain who continued to make a living in the old illegal ways.

Of handcuffs there were but two pairs. With one of these he ironed Motopu to a stanchion; the other he passed through a ringbolt on the deck, snapping one cuff on Tivi and one on Squarface. With the keys in Bill's pocket, Emily would be unable to free either, unless she found another key, which was always possible.

Bill had then the task of hauling the rowboat back into the lagoon. That was not hard, for his strength. He had learned the location of the cache from the Polynesian, and as he waited for dawn he recalled all he had ever learned of the habits of conger eels.

With the first light he must dive. The wind was steadily strengthening. Clouds had blotted out the starlight, and spits of rain were falling—level

rain, blown with a velocity that made the drops beat against his body like hailstones. Even in the lee of the atoll the schooners were tugging heavily at their anchors, and the signs indicated that by morning the wind would increase to gale force.

WITH the first streak of gray in the sky Emily joined him at the lagoon, walking across the sand, bent forward to make progress against the wind. Evidently before swimming ashore she had been to see her father.

"Bill, I'm ashamed of you!" was her first word. "With everybody handcuffed what could I do if the anchors dragged? Are you going to dive with the keys in your pocket?"

The pearler flushed and handed the keys to her. "I mean to come up again, but—you're right, at that," he growled. "You'll give me your word you won't set Tivi free while I'm under water?"

At the girl's nod Bill grinned, more at his ease.

"I can't take my revolver down with me either, you see," he explained. "Say, Emily, how about calling it off? I hate to feel you're against me, too!"

"Call it off? Doing that means father must comb the beach forever," snapped the girl. "I promise to do just what you asked, while you're below. Still, I'm against you." Emily smiled rather tremulously. "I'd rather not be. Why don't you let Tivi go down for you?"

"Nice guy I'd be—objecting to him because of his race, and letting him take on a job I flunked," Bill grunted. "You going back?"

"I'd rather stay here. You may need help coming out of the water," Emily pleaded. "Tivi told me to. He

knows what you're up against better than you do, Bill."

"Trying to scare me over a twenty-foot sea-snake? Well, watch, then!" Bill grunted.

Day had dawned gray through the clouds. He shoved the boat into the water and let Emily scull, while he examined the bottom through a water-glass. On the bearing Tivi had given him he saw a patch of oyster shells some ten feet square, among them a red and white object which was the strip of cloth Tivi had torn from his *pareu* to wrap around the pearls.

Bill made the ordinary preparations for a dive. He dropped an anchor stone to the bottom, the rope of which would guide him in his ascent, put diver's spectacles over his eyes, and crouched in the bow, breathing in swift, short gasps that filled every corner of his lungs with free air. To save time in the descent he was using a diving stone. When he was ready he grinned at Emily, rolled the heavy block of coral over the bow, and let it carry him down.

AT forty feet the pressure was tremendous. He thought that his eardrums would burst inward and his chest collapse. Grimly he held on, going deep into water that was darker and darker gray. The pressure, though all he could endure, seemingly got no worse. The bottom marked by the oyster shells seemed to float upward to meet him. His lungs were bursting.

In good diver fashion he blew out a bit of air, though he had been under less than ten seconds. The diving stone grounded, and he reached out for the bit of red and white rag, only a yard from his hand.

Further he could not see in the gray

murk of the water. Though his nerves were steeled and the thing expected, the flash of a dark body toward him swift as a striking snake, the grip of viselike teeth upon his forearm, made him exhale precious air.

Almost he dropped the pearls, for the grip of the eel was like a trap, nearly paralyzing his arm. The jaws were closed between wrist and elbow. He felt the prick of needle-sharp teeth. The black body, thick as his own arm, trailed away into the gray.

Bill pulled with all his strength. The thing that held him did not yield an inch. He twisted, but the hold of those tiny, pointed teeth could not be shaken. He had heard as much in many divers' tales. No man is strong enough to pull a big conger eel from its hole; as well might the diver that is caught attempt to pull himself from the grip of a bulldog.

Bill slashed and stabbed at the snaky body. The knife edge slid over the black skin. That he had heard too, but he could no more refrain from the vain fight than from the vain efforts to escape.

He wished that he might see the eyes of the thing. The black rod of cold flesh clamped to his arm did not seem alive. It was tireless, inexorable. For the man it caught there was but one escape. A bull lowers its head to charge; a devilfish advances its head when its tenacles hold its victim fast; a conger eel will shift its grip. Against each enemy there is one instant that must be seized for victory.

Bill dropped his knife and set his feet in the sand. He waited. His head rang. Slowly the pressure of the depths was squeezing the strength from him. The eel held on. Bill was weakening, but excitement was gone, and fear he had never had. The change of grip

would be quick. Specks of black floated across his eyes. The desire for air was overwhelming. He locked his lips to keep from gulping water. Waited—waited.

INSTANTANEOUS with the release of the eel's jaws Bill gave a jerk that freed his arm and leaped upward from the sand, swimming desperately. He had escaped. The great danger—that the eel might fasten again on his ankle—passed. The anchor rope brushed against his face. With bursting lungs he swam up and up until his head rose into the air.

He barely had strength to reach up to catch the gunwale of the boat. He was thankful for the arm Emily slipped under his shoulder, supporting him, for the pain of breathing and the release of pressure on his body was torture. He tossed the pearls into the boat, and grinned. In his weakness the girl's dark head and dark eyes swam before him mistily.

"Tivi's—a man—all right," he gasped. "That—takes—a chief—"

Emily was trying to lift him. Summoning the last reserve of his strength he scrambled over the gunwale and tumbled head first into the bottom of the boat, where he lay face downward, too weak to raise his head.

The girl bent over him. She held his revolver by the barrel, but Bellow Bill did not see that; indeed, if he had seen he could hardly have made any resistance. He barely felt the impact of the revolver butt behind his ear. Darkness blotted out the pain that racked him. With a long sigh he collapsed.

The revolver slipped from Emily's trembling fingers, but as she had forced herself to strike, she now summoned the resolution to lash Bill's wrists and

ankles. She drew the cords no tighter than she had to. She gave a gasp of relief when Bill stirred, but nevertheless the knots she tied were strong. No sailor could have bound a prisoner more firmly.

Pulling up the anchor, she rowed to the shore of the lagoon, and with an anxious look at the flying storm clouds overhead, took the pearls and the handcuff keys and ran back toward the schooners, her skirts and her dark hair flying before the rush of the wind.

CHAPTER V.

STORM WRACK.

BILL was conscious before Squareface and Tivi were released. By the time the Polynesian returned to the atoll for him, the pearler had recovered both from the effects of the dive and of the double cross. Against Emily he felt no resentment. She had warned him she would fight for the sake of her father, and Bill could only admire her for fighting to the finish, even though it was his finish.

When he saw Tivi he grinned.

"You picked a good seagoing watchdog for those pearls, fella!" he rumbled in the deep voice. "To plan to swim down into the mouth of that eel deliberately—well, you're there, that's all!"

"I am used to the deep water. My brother is not," replied the native gravely, and bending over he swung Bill onto his back, no mean feat of strength. The boat Tivi abandoned. Carrying Bill, he ran across the atoll, and swam to his own schooner.

He took care to hold Bill's head above the water, and once aboard the ship he did not join in either the threats or the jeers which Squareface heaped upon the prisoners.

The beach comber's bloated face was savagely triumphant. To hear him talk one would have thought that he alone had overcome both Motopu Mike and Bill, and that nothing remained but a safe and uneventful cruise to some missionary. In imagination, Squareface was already tasting the delights of a debauch in New York, and the last vestige of friendship Bill had for the man as the father of Emily died there on the heaving deck.

Tivi, on the contrary, was grave; as well he might be. The wind was rising into one of the short, fierce storms that lash the South Pacific at the beginning of the hurricane season. Even without the encumbrance of prisoners the task was one to try all the resources of a sailor.

The native, however, shrank from none of it. He carried Bill into the fo'c's'le, by which the pearler inferred that Motopu Mike was still ironed in the cabin, and commenced to get under way. By the sounds Bill could follow the progress made almost as clearly as though he had been on deck.

He wondered first what would be done with Motopu's schooner. A timid or unscrupulous sailor would have abandoned her at the anchorage, where she would certainly have been wrecked. Tivi did not. In the distance Bill heard the sound of an anchor being raised, and nodded his coppery yellow hair in grim approval.

Tivi was going to take the schooner in tow, dealing with Motopu in honest seagoing fashion. A ship is more than the crew: kill a skipper if you must, but don't wreck his boat. So Bellow Bill himself would have done.

Tivi swam back to his own schooner, loosened canvas which slatted with the cracking roar of a battery of 75's, and raised the anchor. Once under way the

schooner careened till the rail was flat to the sea. Bill rolled down the deck, slanted like a house roof, till he was stopped short by the bunks on the lee side.

Owing to the schooner in tow, Tivi could not heave to. Sailing as he was, a little free, the schooner caught heavy weather. At the more violent gusts she went all but on her beam ends. Green seas swept the decks, and when the slide of the fo'c's'le hatch was pulled back spray drenched Bill as though the contents of a bucket had been tossed over him.

EMILY came to visit him. She tried to roll the big pearler into a bunk, which was a task much too great for her strength.

"I'd like to make you comfortable," she said, after having failed. "I—don't just lie there, Bill!" she broke out vehemently. "Say it! Tell me I'm no good, that I betrayed you. I deserve it!"

"Quit adding hysteria to sentiment, kid," Bill rumbled. "You might get me a mug of water, though... I got rid of the others, and you got rid of me. O. K. Fair enough. I ain't worrying."

Emily went to the scuttle butt, and Bill raised the thick China mug awkwardly with bound hands. There was a calculating, almost exultant light in the dark blue eyes that the girl failed to observe.

"I never waste energy worrying over the past, or the future. Take a leaf from an old roughneck's book," he rumbled. "You shouldn't apologize for fighting. Lot of people would say you was noble for doing what you did. In my opinion you're just wrong, and that's that."

The schooner lay far over in the sea and a big wave tumbled on the

deck overhead. The sound was like the dumping of a truckload of rock. Bill shook his head.

"Yes, Tivi had begun to shorten sail when I left," said Emily in reply to his unasked question. "Well—that's all, Bill. I was anxious for you to be sure that I didn't want to strike you." She held out her hand for the drinking mug.

As Bill extended it he appeared to lose his balance as the schooner pitched down the crest of a big sea. The cup struck against the deck and broke into pieces. The pearler shrugged.

"Little loss," he grunted. "So long then, kid."

But when the girl was gone Bellow Bill took a sharp-edged fragment of the cup which he had hidden under his body and commenced to scrape at the lashings on his wrists. He had said that he never worried. He might have added that he never gave up. In a few hours at most he could free himself, and the storm would keep Tivi and Squareface on deck for that length of time.

Bellow Bill had not more than raised a little lint on his bonds, however, before any prospect of freeing himself vanished with the suddenness of all disasters at sea. The schooner was beaten flat by the most violent squall yet, and in the worst of it her speed was checked. Squareface, terrified, had luffed. The drag of the vessel astern twisted the schooner onto the opposite tack and the boom jibed, swinging like a flail from port to starboard.

THE shock snapped the fifty-foot spar like a match stick. Half dropped into the sea, where it battered against the schooner's side. The first blow started the butts of three planks. Bill saw water spurt into the fo'c's'le as the schooner fell into the

trough, swept by every wave, helpless because of the drag of spar and sail. The only hope was to cut her free, quickly, and Bill ground his teeth in helplessness.

In a literal sense the mishap put Tivi between the deep sea and a pair of devils named Motopu and Bellow Bill. One man might cut the wreckage clear before the schooner was stove in; though Bill, in a perfect position to judge, doubted it. Three trained seamen, or two, could save her. Though he doubted Squareface's courage and Emily's strength, Bill supposed the native would try to use them.

He was surprised when the fo'c's'le slide was thrown back and Emily leaped down, knife in hand, and began to saw at his wrists.

"Tivi's unlocking Motopu," she panted. "Dad said not to."

"Your father would!" snapped Bill. He caught the knife from her, severed his ankle bindings in one sweep, and ran for the deck.

Squareface was hacking at the main sheet with a pocket knife—futilely, for the sail would hold the broken boom alongside even after the sheet was severed. Bill leaped for the hatchet kept near the wheel. One blow, struck in passing, severed the sheet; half a dozen more as he ran forward parted backstays and shrouds. The mast snapped five feet above the deck and went over-side, where it battered at the side planking; but the schooner, freed from the pressure of the wind on the canvas, rolled back on a level keel.

Green water was sweeping the decks knee deep, and Tivi was still nowhere to be seen. Bill chopped through the remaining shrouds and stays. The wreckage floated clear, and for the moment the drag of the schooner towed astern, which still offered bare spars

to the gale, kept the battered craft head to the sea.

The operation took less than ninety seconds, but without help one man could do no more. Both vessels would be in the trough of the seas unless emergency sail aft could be rigged. Louder than the gale Bill bellowed for Tivi. The big pearler's voice was made for such emergencies. It galvanized the panic-stricken beach comber, who came running aft and stood by the wheel ready to steer. Yet though Tivi must have heard he made no response. Bill went down the companionway in one leap, hatchet in hand.

He was not too quick. Tivi and Motopu were locked in a desperate wrestle. Careless of danger to the ship and to himself, the pirate was fighting to obtain the pearls, which, torn from Tivi's *pareu*, lay on the deck across which the two rolled.

Each had the other by the throat. Each was swinging short-arm blows, making no attempt to guard, but while Tivi had no weapon Motopu had snatched up the handcuffs, which he held like a pair of brass knuckles. Already he had laid the Polynesian's forehead open by a glancing blow, and he was trying to steady himself against the violent rolling of the schooner for a finishing punch at his dazed, half-unconscious adversary.

Bellow Bill wrenched the two apart, lifted Motopu to his knees, and knocked him clear to the companionway stairs with a right hand swing. For an instant the red-bearded pirate crouched, panting and glaring, full of fight. But Bill was nearest the pearls, and stooped swiftly to snatch up the hatchet he had dropped to separate the combatants.

The pearler was anxious only to get back to the deck. Without stopping to

pick up the pearls he lunged for the ladder. What Motopu saw was a huge tattooed man with teeth bared and a hatchet half upraised leaping toward him. The pirate expected to feel the steel crash into his skull. He uttered a scream of terror and went up the stairs at one leap, Bill at his heels.

ON deck Motopu collided with Squareface. He struck one blow. His steel-wrapped fist crashed against the beach comber's temple, dropping him like a log. Without pausing, Motopu plunged straight over the stern into the sea.

He caught the towrope as he rose, which alternately raised him into the air and plunged him into waves foam-white and beaten flat by the force of the wind. He kicked and spat like a wet cat clutching a string, yet managed at the risk of his life to shake a fist at Bill. Motopu must have expected the towline to be cut, which would certainly have drowned him. He was game and vicious to the end.

Bill, however, only waved his hatchet; and the pirate, understanding that his life was to be spared, set about working his way along the rope toward his own schooner. The distance was not over a hundred and fifty feet. A strong man could make it, and Bill, who cared little whether Motopu lived or died, knelt beside Squareface.

He was still on his knees when Tivi reeled up the companionway with a diver's knife clutched in a brown fist. The native was on the point of hurling himself at Bill when the pearler held up his hand—empty, palm forward.

"Steady!" his ringing voice boomed out. "Dead men don't make bridegrooms, brother! Get a storm trysail on what's left of that mast, if you can, while I look after George here. We

can settle when the sea's calm—if we're afloat."

In mid stride Tivi stopped, the fury dying from his black eyes.

"Thy pardon, brother," he responded in Polynesian. "I seized the knife thinking all white men were alike, but thou—almost thou art fit to be a chief of Raratonga!"

Though the moment was not one for laughter—green water swept ankle deep across the decks, and Squareface lay very still—Bellow Bill could not restrain himself. His laugh went roaring over the sea. He—fit to be chief of a few hundred brown divers! He should hope so! And yet, Raratonga was Tivi's world. The brown man could have paid no higher compliment.

Suddenly grave, the pearler felt for Squareface's pulse. Emily was making her way aft, her face whiter than her father's.

"He's living!" Bill called. The pulse was strong, though ominously slow. The only visible injury was a bruise on the temple, yet Bill dared not feel the spot. He had seen the work of brass knuckles before, and feared to discover the skull had been fractured.

Emily dropped to the deck beside him and took her father's head in her lap. She kissed the dead-white forehead.

"I don't like the way he breathes," she gasped. "So slow—"

"Why, he's been knocked for a loop, that's all!" Bill almost shouted, for he was trying to drown the girl's fears by the loudness of his voice. He doubted whether Squareface would ever be conscious again. A slight flow of blood from the ears was an ominous symptom. "Just hold him quietly while Tivi and I rig a trysail. Then we'll get him into a bunk."

The pearler rose, picked up the hatchet. Astern, Motopu had reached

his own schooner and was climbing up the bobstay. Bill severed his towline, which permitted his boat to drift more easily before the seas. Forward, Tivi was struggling with the sail. Bill ran to help. Fifteen minutes of hard work saw the canvas rigged. The schooner came head to the seas. Less water swept down her decks. If the gale got no worse she would live through it. If the wind rose, all that seamanship could do had been done.

Bill filled his cheek with fine-cut, chewed and spat.

"Damned if I wouldn't like some tobacco that wasn't watersoaked," he rumbled, gazing aft. Half a mile away Motopu had hove to under triple-reefed spanker and storm jib. "Is he standing by to help us if we need it, or is he still pearl hunting?" Bill rumbled to Tivi.

The native stared gloomily at the other schooner, which was keeping as close to them as possible. Out of the corners of his eyes he studied the big tattooed man at his side. Bill understood.

"Tough to have the game slip out of your hands because you played fair, ain't it?" he asked. "Still, you had your chance. Don't hurry to get rid of me. I think Motopu's pearl hunting, and I may be useful yet. Meanwhile, we can make Squareface comfortable—poor devil!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRIPPLED SCHOONER.

UNTIL the middle of the afternoon, when the gale blew itself out, the situation did not change. The crippled schooner drifted, with Motopu never more than a mile away. Squareface lay in the cabin, nursed by

his daughter, but not recovering consciousness. Pulse and respiration continued at the same rate.

Though Bill was now sure that the skull had been fractured, there was nothing that he could do. A surgeon could not have operated aboard the schooner. He said as much to Emily.

"Father 'll need me more than ever when we get him ashore," she answered resolutely. "The cost of an operation—"

"You mean you're set on going through with this?"

"Of course. The more I can do for father, the more I want to do. You won't agree with that, because you're a man. Men think of themselves. They think they've got a right to make a girl do just what they please." She stared at Bill defiantly. He shrugged. "And they don't like helpless things, like sick men and babies, that a woman will do anything in the world for!"

"Well, I got to follow a man's way, ain't I, being a man?" Bill grinned. "We needn't argue, kid. You look after your dad, while I see to the schooner."

Back on deck Bill discovered that the gale had dropped to a fresh sailing breeze. The schooner, of course, continued to wallow in the big waves kicked up by the storm, and he was able only to set a jib in addition to the try-sail. The crippled schooner crawled along at a scant mile an hour, yawing widely, and almost unmanageable.

In marked contrast Motopu Mike shook out mainsail and jib and drove down upon Tivi's craft with the swoop of a hawk diving upon a crippled pigeon. Obviously he was making an attack, but of what kind Bill could only guess. He turned the wheel over to Tivi and stood ready with his revolver.

The best of marksman could not have

done accurate shooting in that sea, but Bill hoped his bullets would keep the pirate from ramming or boarding. He was positive that Motopu had no fire-arms, and these were the only tactics he could anticipate.

As the two schooners neared, Bill could not see his enemy. Motopu must be lying flat on the deck, beneath the wheel. Foam creamed under the cut-water of his schooner as he drove in with a speed and on a course that made collision seem inevitable. At the last second, however, Motopu swung out and passed in front of the bow. As he crossed, Bill saw a yellow-colored stick, trailing a wisp of smoke, arch over the rail of the pirate's schooner and fall into the water, directly in the path of his own.

"Dynamite!" boomed Bill. "Hold hard, all!"

The explosion wrenched the schooner as though she had struck a rock. At the bow a column of water leaped into the air and fell in heavy drops. Bill pocketed his useless revolver and ran forward, to return with blazing eyes and a face of stone.

Emily was on deck.

"Needn't move your father just yet," snapped the pearler. "The explosion stove a two-foot hole in us. Mostly above the water line, but we'll sink if he keeps on bombing. He won't hesitate to drown us, either... Here he comes again—to palaver, I guess."

Motopu had gone about and was maneuvering to pass again at slightly greater distance. He remained invisible, but his voice was clearly audible.

"Throw over the pearls on a life preserver, and I'll let you go!"

"Will you, though?" Bill muttered deep in his chest, but instead of answering he looked inquiringly at Tivi. The pearls belonged to the Polynesian.

The grizzled head was bowed; and the sad resignation of a race that has seen death reduce its ranks from thousands to dozens since the coming of the white man, that has had its customs, its religion, and its pleasures swept away, and has been impotent to resist, made the native's huge shoulders droop. His people had become used to failure, and the knowledge of failure was on his face; yet the dark eyes glowed with a fire Bill had never seen in them before. Instead of reaching for a life preserver he motioned Emily to take the pearls.

"Keep them, Flower of the Sea, at least for a little while," he said. "They are my gift. I cannot give them away, and lose you. Later, if need be, they will bring you safety. Love is never wrong. Mine is not wrong nor weak."

THE big, brown man turned to face Bellow Bill.

"Motopu cannot steer and guard the forepart of his boat!" he suggested.

"Right!" snapped the pearler, who had the same thought. Since the one-eared pirate must pass close in order to place the dynamite charges, there was a chance for a good swimmer, who chose the right course, to swim between the two ships and board by the bobstay as the other schooner passed.

"But, here! Wait!" Bill shouted, for Tivi had given the wheel to Emily and was poised on the taffrail.

"Once, you swam in my place. That is enough!" said Tivi, and went over the side.

Bill cursed aloud. The dive was premature. Motopu was still a hundred yards away, able to see that counter attack, able to heave to and fight the man in the water, or avoid him altogether.

"More brave foolishness!" Bill commented, aware even in this crisis that Tivi's recklessness was most advantageous to him. Emily had the pearls, and whether the native succeeded or failed in his fight with Motopu, he could not board his own schooner again against Bill's will.

That Tivi would use dynamite was unthinkable. Bill had only to wait, now. The value of the pearls was unimportant; still, he had to give them away.

Fists clenched, Bill watched the other schooner rush down upon Tivi's head. Before the Polynesian could catch the bobstay the schooner swung about, and from the stern a spluttering stick of dynamite was flung toward the swimmer. Tivi kept on, taking the chance that there had been no time to shorten the fuse. The schooner was coming about, and though he must swim directly over the spot where the dynamite was sinking, if he lived he would be able to overtake the schooner while she circled.

"Damn' foolishness!" Bill muttered. He was looking at Emily now. The blue eyes were full of dancing flames, and there was an ironic twist to his lips. Prudence and common sense counseled him to stay where he was, for Tivi, however gallant he might be, was an adversary. Bill was not actuated by an impulse. The ironical smile was at himself. He could not stand idle and let a weakling's victory drop into his hands.

"And here's more foolishness!" he added, and dived overboard to give the Polynesian what help he could.

THOUGH the distance between the two schooners was short, Bill swung himself aboard Motopu's vessel none too quickly. The bearded pirate had armed himself with a cap-

stan bar, and with that unwieldy club was battering Tivi. The native had managed to come to grips with his enemy, but the grizzled head was streaming blood.

As Bill ran aft, Tivi's grip shifted from Motopu's waist to his knees. The pirate shortened his grip on the six-foot bar of oak for a finishing blow, but the charge of the pearler hurried him. The stroke that should have cracked Tivi's skull landed on his back and shoulder. Nevertheless, Motopu was able to kick his legs free and aim a two-handed sweep at Bill's head.

Bill caught the blow on an upraised forearm. He felt the bone snap, but at the cost of a useless left arm he was inside the swing of the club. He caught Motopu around the waist, jerked him off his feet, and fell upon him with all his weight.

For a second or two Bill could do no more than hold the pirate. The pain of the broken arm, aggravated by the fall, benumbed him. Motopu bit and kicked for a time, then squirmed, forcing an arm under Bill's body toward his own waist. He was clawing for a knife. Bill knew he could never prevent the pirate from drawing it.

Bill's good hand shifted from Motopu's waist to throat. As the steel flashed, Bill threw himself back, holding Motopu above him at the full length of a long tattooed arm. The knife nicked the pearler's ribs as he flung Motopu against the deck, and set his knees on the pirate's arms close to the elbows. Motopu's heels beat a tattoo on the deck. He tried to twist the knife against Bill's side, but the pearler was too heavy. His knee kept Motopu's arms pinned fast, and again Bill's good hand found the bearded throat.

Bill did not mean to kill. He had forgotten Tivi until a shadow fell up-

on him. Instantly there was the swish of a club before his eyes, and Motopu's features were horribly blotted out. Bill sprang back, believing the blow had been aimed at his own head, but Tivi only rested the end of the capstan bar upon the deck and leaned upon it, without attacking.

"He would have drowned her," he said. "He was a bad man. I am glad I killed him."

"Thought you were going to kill *me!*"

Tivi shook his head with the utmost simplicity. "No. Not yet," he replied. "I would not kill you as I would stamp on a centipede, brother. I wish to do right—as a white man would. When white men cannot agree, they fight. The English and Americans with their fists, in a ring, with many looking on. The French, with pistols, with two to watch, besides a doctor. How they fight makes no difference. They are only careful the fight shall be fair."

"You'll fight a duel for Emily?" Bill rumbled. "It's the man's way."

"We need no one to make us fight fair," declared the Polynesian, with grave pride. "Yet your arm is broken, brother, and there are no pistols."

"You're considerably bunged up yourself," grunted Bellow Bill cheerfully. "I'd fight you with one hand if you knew anything about boxing. Tell you what! Let's take a belaying pin apiece. All the same war-club, eh, brother?"

The Polynesian's eyes lighted. The *u'u* was his racial weapon. The war-club of the South Seas is a paddle-shaped, sharp-edged, three-foot club of hard wood; and though a belaying pin is only a foot long, the club play is the same with both. There is little chance for parry or riposte, as with sword.

One blow decides the fight, and the odds are on the more active man.

TIVI felt that he had an advantage, but Bellow Bill had used the war-club in the Marquesas, and in reality the duel was fair. They armed themselves from the nearest pin rail and advanced, swaying easily to the roll of the schooner. Emily's scream reached them faintly. Both smiled. They shifted and sidestepped like two boxers, each waiting for the other to lead.

Every movement sent a jab of pain from Bill's arm to the shoulder. His footwork was slow. He shrugged. There are no rules in a fight with the *u'u*. Flashingly Tivi swung out a bare foot, all but tripping him. The native's club slipped from his right hand to his left, snapped up and back. His upraised right arm guarded against a counter blow.

Like lightning Bill seized the only opening left—Tivi's body. Underhand he threw his belaying pin, before the upraised club could fall. Butt first, the missile struck Tivi. The native doubled up, and Bill snapped an uppercut to the exposed jaw with all his two hundred and twenty pounds of hard muscle behind the fist. Tivi was lifted into the air and dropped in a heap. He did not move, and Bill stepped back grimly.

He could not have knocked the Polynesian out more thoroughly with a club. As far as the duel between them went, that was that. Tivi was licked. And yet, Bill's struggle was far from ended. Fists would not help him against Emily.

He had left his revolver on the other schooner. Emily was resolute enough to use it.

Bellow Bill was tired. His arm hurt.

He was tempted to bind Tivi hand and foot, to keep the schooners apart, and command Emily to swim to him, so that he could disarm her as she climbed aboard. Certainly he could do no more fighting with a broken arm.

But to his surprise Emily was not on the deck of the other schooner. She might not have seen his fight with Tivi, and might never know of it, for though Bill had gone so far as to pick up a rope, he could not quite force himself to bind Tivi's wrists. The Polynesian deserved to be treated like the honorable foeman he had proved himself. After all, the schooners were a long way from Thursday Island, and even if Bill were able to keep the party under his thumb while they remained at sea, Emily could do what she pleased once she arrived in civilization. The men were done with their fighting, but the girl would have the last word.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEASURE OF A MAN.

TIVI opened his eyes slowly and lay staring at the sky for a long time. He must have decided upon every detail of what he meant to do before he rose, for without a word to Bellow Bill he walked to the wheel and steered Motopu's schooner alongside his own. As the two craft bumped together Emily emerged from the companionway. Her dark head was bowed, and what Bill could see of the girl's face was white as chalk.

Tivi did not seem to notice the girl at all. He jumped aboard his own boat and walked to the wheel, leaning over it with his great shoulders bowed and his eyes far off on the horizon.

"Did you—kill Motopu?" asked Emily. There were harsh lines around

her mouth and her voice was a dull monotone, as though to speak were an effort.

"Aye," said Tivi. With a brown arm, streaked with blood that had flowed from his injured head, he pointed toward the west. Far away the sky line was notched by two sails, white and sharply defined against the crimson of the sunset. "There are Kory and the Japanese. They live, and Motopu is dead. It is finished, Bellow Bill. *They* have no dynamite. After the storm comes the calm."

"Finished? What do you mean?" said Emily stiffly. "Don't you want to marry me, Tivi? Forget Bill! I'm willing to carry out our bargain."

"There are no bargains in love. Only gifts, Flower of the Sea." The big brown man refused to look at the girl. His eyes remained fixed on the far-away schooners.

"Want?" he went on resignedly. "The child cries for the moon, and the man for a woman. But I am no child, not to know what is beyond my reach. With me you would not be happy, Flower of the Sea. Your people would laugh at you, and I am not strong enough to still their tongues."

"I don't care what people say; I am willing to marry you. But—if you don't want me"—the hard lines around Emily's mouth disappeared, and she drew a deep breath—"of course, I'll give back the pearls."

"A chief takes back no gifts," said Tivi proudly. "Freely I gave them, and I do not fear to be poor. Not when I am alone. I am not a white man. Use the pearls for your father, Flower of the Sea. Use them to go to the islands where all people are white, and where there are schools." And now Tivi looked Emily in the eyes. "That is my gift," he declared. "Let Bill show

you how to use it. He is the better and the wiser man."

"The stronger and the trickier, you mean," Bill rumbled in contradiction, reaching out to grip the big brown hand that rested on the spokes of the wheel. From a scratch on his own hand blood was mingling with the blood on the reddening fingers in his grip.

He recalled the primitive ceremony of blood brothership, a rite more solemn and as highly regarded as marriage throughout the South Seas.

"*Kaohoa*, brother in the blood!" Bill greeted him.

Tivi's dark eyes glowed with pride. The brown fingers gripped tensely, then relaxed.

"Aye, brother! That is well!" he whispered. "With such a brother, I am rich. Take the Flower of the Sea and her father on the other schooner now. I would like to be alone."

"Doubt if we ought to move Squareface—"

"We can move him," said Emily. "He is dead, Bill. The shock of the explosion—"

"Dead!" cried the pearler. "Then why were you willing to marry—"

Emily flung up her head. "I couldn't welch, even if I have nothing to gain. It was only fair to Tivi."

Bill was speechless, but Tivi nodded gravely.

"Dead? That is best. He was not a good man," he muttered. "It is finished. Farewell, my brother. Farewell..." He stopped. The farewell to Emily stuck in his throat.

Bill went below quickly, and returned soon, carrying the body. He stepped aboard the other schooner, Emily following, and trimmed the sail. Rapidly a space of heaving sea opened

between the two vessels. Under the cutwater the water gurgled as Bill set a course to join Kory.

ASTERN, Tivi's schooner wallowed heavily. The Polynesian remained with arms folded over the wheel, watching Emily sail away. The great shoulders had the droop that comes to a powerful man who has found himself not strong enough to contend with forces which are overwhelming, and which he does not quite understand. Yet the battered head was erect.

Emily touched Bill's shoulder. "I ought to thank you," she whispered, very low, as though the distant figure on the crippled schooner could hear. "I do, too. And yet I'm glad you weren't strong enough to beat me. He was a man, Bill!"

"And takes a licking like a man," Bellow Bill agreed. "I hope I can do as well when my turn comes."

"You—licked?"

"Even a roughneck like me!"

Bill glanced at the fresh, vivid beauty of the dark face that stared at him with eyes widened in bewilderment, and instantly looked upward at the sail. "It's my luck to be hard-boiled and enjoy risking my neck. You take those pearls and go to Frisco. Get an education, and *stay* there."

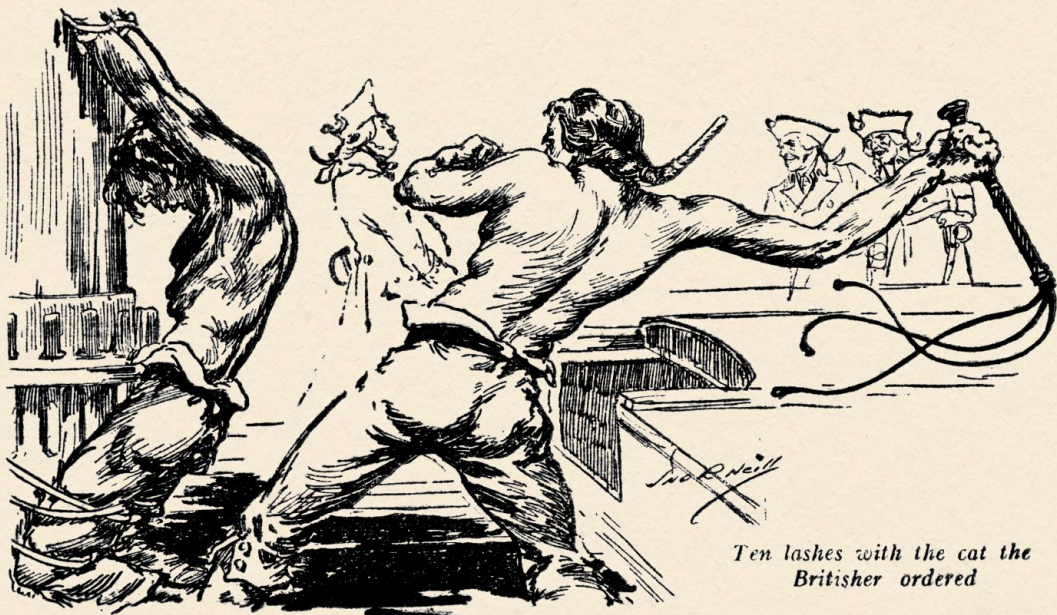
"Half the pearls are yours."

"The devil they are! Not even one of 'em," said Bill, still more gruffly.

The coppery yellow head shook determinedly, the blue eyes glanced fleetingly at the girl as Bellow Bill boomed:

"No man's going to keep you in the South Seas to waste yourself on some lonely atoll and raise kids that might go native. Liquor and fighting and love—they're all good, but they don't go together. Which is a damn' shame!"

THE END.



Ten lashes with the cat the Britisher ordered

Tiger Dick's Doubloons

Driven by storm into the buccaneer-infested waters of the Spanish Main, young Ned Allen and his comrades face a grim fate when the captain of a British convict ship catches them smuggling arms to the American rebels

By DON MCGREW

Author of "Alexander the Red," "The Masked Barmaid," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

NED ALLEN (who is telling the story), son of a Virginia colonist, finds himself penniless in Liverpool, in 1775. His landlord, Jed Morgan, a former seaman, drops dead with fright at the sight of Tiger Dick Buntline; but young Allen sees no cause for fear in the round-faced, whistling mate, and leaps at the chance to sail to America as supercargo with him.

The ship Bonny Lee, driven to the Caribbean by storms, and leaking badly, heads at Tiger Dick's suggestion for the old pirate isle of Camano, to

careen and refit. They fall in with a dismayed British convict ship, the Vulture; but its captain, Bradbury, repays Captain Fogg's offer of a tow with a search of the Bonny Lee, which uncovers some contraband muskets destined for the disaffected colonists.

Aboard the Vulture, Allen falls afoul of a foppish British officer, Beau Tyron, who is threatening a prisoner, the patrician Gwendolyn Leigh. Tyron had found her taking part of her legacy, against her aunt's orders, to escape from England to her native Virginia; and he is railroading her to the

This story began in the Argosy for October 18.

Australian penal colony—unless she agrees to marry him.

CHAPTER V—(*Continued*).

TYRANTS OF THE CONVICT SHIP.

TEN lashes was what Captain Bradbury of the *Vulture* furiously ordered for me; and ten I received—furiously laid on. I am a strong man, but the scars are upon my back to this day. How I was enabled to keep from crying out I cannot tell you, for the pain seemed more than mortal man could bear. At the end I was well-nigh fainting, so that I have only a hazy recollection of being helped down the companionway by Cap'n Fogg.

"My poor boy, my poor boy!" were the first clear words I heard from him. He was by no means an iron-fisted skipper at that moment, but more like a kindly father.

"I'll be right as rain very soon," I was able to assure him. "What happened in the cabin, sir?"

"See the sergeant there in the sheets?" said he, with a snort of rage. "To all intents and purposes we're prisoners. If he don't get masts to suit him quick enough, burn him, he's going to take my ship. Confiscate it, by gum, because of those muskets. He hasn't stores enough, he says, to lay to very long, and he's got the law on his side, the robber—what with this embargo against firearms being shipped in. That's the long and short of it, and we're helpless."

"He'll take the ship and maroon us till we can ship masts on the *Vulture*?" I cried. "Is that what he means?"

"That," said Cap'n Fogg, "is exactly what he means."

I kept quiet until we were again in

the after cabin of the *Bonny Lee*, and Dick joined us. That worthy cried out in sympathy and sprang to dress my lacerated back. No sooner had the sergeant mounted the ladder and gone on deck than I declared:

"There's something under way that's not legal. Bradbury wants to get away. He'd never desert a ship like the *Vulture*, merely to confiscate a cargo."

"Right you are, my son," said Cap'n Fogg. "It's a rum lay, and you may lay to that."

"But, see here!" cried Dick. "Didn't you tell skipper here as I've a scheme?"

"I hadn't the chance," I said.

Dick's round, fat face was afire with eagerness. Quickly he assured himself that the sergeant was not listening at the door, and he made so bold as to seize Cap'n Fogg's shoulder in his excitement.

"Does you mean to say," he whispered hoarsely, "as you'd let that red-faced lousy swab clean you out, from truck to keelson?"

"You'd see what I'd do if I had hands aboard!" retorted the tired skipper, with sharp asperity.

"Hands, is it?" snorted Dick. "Hands, you say? Well, there's about thirty hands as will sign up with Cap'n Fogg, as quick as winking. Aye, and on half duff at that."

Cap'n Fogg sat up suddenly. "I suppose," said he, "that you mean the convicts!"

"The same," Dick assented eagerly, "as ever was. Though unfortunates is what I'd call most o' them. I told you I knew Long Tom Bellew and them others. You say the word, sir. Just say the word. Maroon us, will he? Well, I reckon not. I'm an easy-going man, as you've seen; I'm not for

hazing and such, not I; but if I don't lay that rum-faced swine athwart, and make him wish he'd never been born, may I be sunk!"

Deep and clever as he was, I think that Dick forgot himself at this juncture; at least his eyes blazed like two tiny points of steel in his great round head.

So I caught my first glimpse of the man's potentialities. It disturbed me. As for Cap'n Fogg, he stared a moment before starting to pace about the cabin in agitation.

"**W**HAT would your plan be, Mr. Buntline?" he inquired nervously.

"We'll have to go in and calk this leak, that's certain, sir. Well, he'll have to give us hands to shift cargo, and such. Watch as he will, Long Tom can sound out the rest of the boys in irons. We'll surprise 'em at night, we will. What's more, if you say the word, we'll clean out what cargo that swab has and make up for what they captured from your ship last fall."

"No!" snapped Cap'n Fogg. "That would be rank piracy."

"Ah, well, would it, now? Wouldn't it be tit for tat? And here's a point, sir: don't we know war's a comin'? Look at them Boston riots! How do we know the war ain't on already, with companies formin' an' drillin' in every colony?"

"I wish I were certain the boys had struck!" muttered Cap'n Fogg. "I'm not, though."

"But it's self-defense!" argued Dick, the perspiration standing on his brow. "Drat the cargo. Let that slide. But don't let's hang in stays when we've hands only too eager to help us."

"I don't half like releasing some of those hands," Cap'n Fogg demurred. "While many are honest, there's them among 'em would cheerfully cut a man's throat for a shilling, I shouldn't wonder."

"Yes," I granted, "but think of what you saw to-day, Cap'n. We'd be more than repaid for freeing those poor devils that never should have been arrested." I was thinking of nobody but Gwendolyn Leigh.

"We can't be choosers, sir!" Dick declared. "Why, with what few hands we've got, we'd like as not be six months refitting that Vulture. Goats and coconuts is what we'd live on, and you may lay to it. Shiver my timbers, but I've a sick heart to think o' that. Aye, and I've a sick heart to think o' my poor men, as once sailed with me, going to Botany Bay. Why, they ain't guilty—begging your pardon—of anything more than you, sir."

Dick appeared to have the right of it. Smuggling is smuggling, whether you break the law with intention to carry contraband French goods into England, or whether you load with muskets for the Sons of Liberty.

"All right," Cap'n Fogg suddenly agreed. His jaw was outthrust. "No piracy, but we'll set every damned convict free and leave the red-faced devil to sweat for it!"

Still thinking of Gwendolyn, I could have hugged him. As for Dick, the man's face shone like a great moon. He nearly broke the captain's hand in a mighty grip.

"You're a skipper after my own heart, by gum!" he cried.

A moment later saw him whistling the strains of the "High Barbaree." He was exuberant. I could not help but remember Jed Morgan's statement. "You never heard a whistle like it, and

never will again." That was a true word.

CHAPTER VI.

BUCCANEERS' ISLAND.

NO sooner had Cap'n Fogg made his decision than he became once more his terse, decisive, capable self. You would never have guessed that so soft a heart beat within the shell he now donned like a coat of armor. My word, I wish you might have seen the muscles knot in that thin, sharp jaw line, and the spark flash in those steel-gray eyes!

Had it not been for that leak, we might have laid our plans to overpower the soldiers aboard us, and run for it. There was the rub. There were but seven redcoats set to guard us—a Sergeant Holmes and six privates; and our numbers had been swelled by twenty convicts, all presumably eager to escape. What if they were hampered by ball and chain, which they were forced to sling over one shoulder or drag when they moved about? Their arms were free.

But we had rammed a submerged derelict, and the water was gaining, inch by inch, and there Captain Bradbury had us. We must put into Hangman's Bay on Camano or sink.

"Had you broached this subject to this man Bellew before I returned?" Cap'n Fogg asked Dick.

"No more than to ask how many he thought would sign on if I got your permission to strike, sir. There's only a few he'd be doubtful of."

"Well, then, so be it," said the skipper, after a moment of thought. "I'd like to have the choosing of my hands in this, but that isn't possible. Your man Bellew should know by this time

who can be trusted to keep his jaw tackle snugged up. Among those convicts, I mean."

"Right you are, sir. You can gamble on Long Tom Bellew."

The skipper nodded, half absently; he was pulling out some old charts. Shortly he produced the one of Camano Island.

I saw that no better place could have been chosen for a pirates' retreat. This was the way of it: the island was about fifteen miles in length and eight or nine miles in width. Except for the bays and inlets, and the curves of the shoreline, the island was almost rectangular in shape.

All round the place the buccaneers had taken soundings, clearly marked upon the yellow bit of parchment, and there were several coves and inlets where ships might have found safe anchorage. There was Execution Inlet, on the west coast; North Cove and Doubloon Bay, on the north shore; and Gig Harbor, on the east.

But a landsman could have picked the pirates' anchorage in a brace of shakes. They had grimly dubbed it Hangman's Bay. You might have sailed round the southern end of the island, and that within a quarter mile of shore, and never have guessed at its existence. That was because a long, narrow island, called Cutlass Sprit, stretched parallel to and within a quarter mile of Camano's southern end, and interposed its four miles or more of heavily wooded ridges between a ship at sea and the entrance to the land-locked bay. At a short distance a stranger would have received the impression of an unbroken shore line.

"When we strike, and how, will depend on what that condemned lobster pot, Bradbury, decides when we wear in," Cap'n Fogg decided. "He'll have

to give us hands to shift this cargo, in any case. That 'll give us our chance. In the meantime, just you tip off your man Bellew that mum's the word till we see how the land lies. We can't risk blabbing."

IT wasn't long after this before the sun neared the edge of the Carib-bean, in the west, and Captain Bradbury sent his mate, Downes, aboard the Bonny Lee.

"Just to help the soldiers keep an eye on you," Downes grandly explained. "By the way, Cap'n Fogg, I like the looks of your berth, and, by your leave, I'll take it. You sail your own ship, my orders is; but see that you sail her true, or it 'll be the worse for you."

I was itching all over to be at the man's throat, but the time was not then ripe. What with the inward excitement, caused by the plot I now found myself involved in, and the pain of my lacerated back, the waiting irked me sadly. I burned with eagerness to break the cruel iron band still fastened around that poor girl's slender ankle; and, being feverish with this, and my anticipation of the coming clash, I found myself unable to sleep. So, after some hours of tossing, I rolled out of my berth and went on deck.

By this time we were making headway toward the north end of Camano. Astern of us the moon was peeping from behind a broken bank of dark clouds, and there was something eerie in the silver sheen it spread over our rippling wake. So, too, with the low, black Vulture, wallowing in tow behind us, and the dark outlines of the island, off our bow.

In the half-light the heavy growth of trees made of the shoreline a mysterious ebony swath, while above them,

and farther inland, rose in silent majesty the stark outlines of four bare and mighty peaks. One the buccaneers had named Old Bailey; another was dubbed Gibbet Spire; a third was called Crow's Nest Peak; while 'Tops'l Hill was the name they had given the tallest spire of the lot. This was the southernmost hill, rising almost directly behind the northern extremity of Hangman's Bay. I remember well how the moon's light shone upon those bare crags, and how in fancy I could hear the pirates' lookout singing out from the heights of Tops'l Hill that electrifying cry, "Sail ho!"

I was standing at the rail, busy with my thoughts, when Dick, who had been on watch, and was just now being relieved by old Tom Newgate, came and placed a warm brown hand over my own.

"Ah, but that was a fine, brave thing you did for that girl, my lad!" he declared. "Cap'n Fogg has been a tellin' me about it. We'll even up for that poor back, and you may lay to it, my boy."

"Have you spoken to Bellew?" I asked him.

"I have, and no mistake. Just you rest easy. If you can't sleep, just you slip into the cabin, and let me dress that back again."

I promised him that I would, and he went below at once, leaving me still on deck.

Well, I had been there but a few minutes longer when old Tom Newgate came over and stood beside me at the rail. The helmsman, Jerry Coffin, was out of earshot.

"How are ye feelin' now, my lad?" old Tom wanted to know.

"Better," I said. "And has the captain told you yet?"

Tom cleared his throat, and spat.

"He has," he returned in strangely troubled tones.

I looked at him quickly.

OLD Tom was generally an uncommunicative fellow. For a man of his age he was remarkably spry, and had proved to be a most efficient bo's'n; but whenever he was off duty he seemed to prefer his own company to that of others.

I have seldom seen a man more capable with tools; he seemed to love the very feel of wood; and at odd hours he was forever whittling at such gimcracks as chains, whittled out of a solid block of oak, or tumbling acrobats that performed under the impetus of a revolving windmill. A square-set, leather-colored, thoughtful old seaman, was Tom, with a quid forever bulging one clean-shaven cheek, and a broad, wrinkled visage that would have passed for a symbol of honesty anywhere.

"Why, Tom," said I, "what's worrying you? You're not afraid of our success, are you?"

He wouldn't meet my eye. He coughed, and scraped his feet, and stared aloft, and then out to sea, and finally spat again.

"It ain't that," he said presently. "Maybe it's because I'm getting old. Maybe it's because them pumps has wore me down. Maybe it's jest them mountings there, so solemn-like and—and mystified, kind of. I don't rightly know. There's something—well, anyway, I feel blue about this here deal, I do."

"Tom," I charged, "you're trying to tell me something!"

He started, I thought guiltily. He only gave me one swift glance, and then, after a look at the cabin, shook his head.

"No!" he said gruffly, after the

manner of a man who has suddenly made up his mind. "It's just that I don't feel well, I don't."

"Tom," I repeated, "you know something. Now, you're an honest man, or I'm a dunce. Come now: back in Jed Morgan's public house you and Dick greeted one another as old shipmates. Well, then, were you shipmates when he sailed with this Bellew?"

"Why, yes, son, to be sure," he answered readily enough. "On the—yes, on the old Green Mermaid, to be sure. What o' that?"

"They're a hard-looking lot, Tom, that's all."

"Maybe," he grunted. Still staring off to sea, he said at last: "Forty-five years at sea, I've been, and I'm getting old. Ah, but the things I've seen! Mates a dyin' with scurvy, and cutlasses swingin', and brisk messmates as got crazy after the jolly sov'rings, and ended up at Execution Dock, by thunder! You'd have your hair on end if I was to tell you all I've been through, I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, son, that's what's the matter. All I want now is to end my days in peace ashore. A little carpenter shop—that's what I wants. And now—well, here's a shindy in the wind, and who knows but what I'll never get that carpenter shop, but go where I've seen so many go before—some to feed the fishes, and some to the gibbet, but all to the long shore?"

"So that's all?" I cried, my suspicions lulled. I clapped him on the back. "You'll live to get that shop," I assured him. "I feel it in my bones."

I LEFT him there, making my way to the little room in the after cabin where Dick held forth. It so happened that I came upon him with his upper garments removed; and I ex-

claimed in amazement as I noted a horrible scar in his corded, muscular back. "How on earth did you ever survive that?" I cried.

"That?" he said easily. He smiled and turned toward me. "Look here," he directed.

I gasped, for his torso was literally intermeshed with ghastly scars. "What is a little cut like that one aft?" he said, showing his even white teeth. "No, I didn't get them fighting, son. Leastwise, not with seamen. 'Twas the Indians did that to me, time I saved Bruno, the dwarf. But you never mind them scars. You'll have some o' your own to carry, I shouldn't wonder."

With that he donned a shirt, and insisted on redressing my burning back with a cooling lotion. This and a drink he mixed for me soon eased my pain and allowed me to drop into a sleep.

When I awoke the sun was shining warm and fair upon a smiling sea, and we were near the southern end of the island. In daylight the air of mystery was dissipated, and the prospect of landing a shore was most alluring. Along the eastern coast there stretched a golden beach, upon which the racing blue combers broke into cascades of sparkling white. Mangos and palm trees furnished a brilliant green contrast to the gleaming, yellow sands, abetted by patches of broad ferns; live oaks, pine and mahogany trees thrived thickly upon the plateaus and promontories; and here and there were green meadows and restful glades, most inviting to a man who has been long at sea.

I remember how my nostrils arched as the gentle offshore breeze bore us the odors of flowers, and how I longed to quench my thirst in the cold, blue waters racing down into Hangman's Bay from the heights of Tops'l Hill.

But the pleasant aspects of the land were temporarily put out of mind a moment later when my eye fell on a coral reef off the eastern end of Cutlass Sprit. Upon it a square-rigged ship had long since impaled herself. She had broken in two amidships, but so firmly spiked was she that the surf had not been able to dislodge her.

Kelp and seaweed filled the split in her hull; one mast still stood, while another banged to and fro in the surf alongside; at least three of her guns were still lashed in place on the deck.

"What do you make of that, Mr. Buntline?" I asked as Dick came up, with his faithful Bruno behind.

"That?" Dick said—and it seemed to me afterward that his voice was a bit off key. "Why, that would be a pirate's hull, and I shouldn't wonder. See there? They've painted out the name on her stern. Afore they abandoned her, I'll gamble. Yes, sir, I'd say they was making for here when a storm disabled them. She ain't been here more'n a few months at most, is my guess."

The tongueless dwarf was making rapid signs with his fingers, and Dick answered him in kind before turning back to me.

"If ships could talk!" he said, with something of a sigh. Then he added: "Ah, there's Cap'n Bradbury puttin' off the Vulture in a gig. We'll know soon what's what, my lad."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST STRAW.

CAPTAIN BRADBURY, as soon as he came aboard, rasped: "I haven't a chart of this here island. I don't like the looks of that wreck there, either."

When Cap'n Fogg gruffly asked him why, Bradbury hotly exclaimed: "Why? Suppose there was a gang of pirates gone ashore off that wreck? That's why."

Thereupon Cap'n Fogg showed the man his chart, and it was decided that both ships would drop anchor off Cutlass Sprit and tow in with the tide. In the meantime Bradbury was to take a boatload ashore and reconnoiter.

"No use in sticking our heads into a trap," said he.

"Maybe he's right," said Dick. "At the same time, something tells me those fellows got off. The boats are gone off that wreck, you'll notice. There would not be much sense in buccaneers wait-in' here for ships to put in, either. There wouldn't be one in a blue moon."

In a few hours Bradbury returned, reporting that he had examined a fort overlooking the lower part of the harbor, and found it deserted and without signs of occupation for several months past. So, as the tide started to make, we manned the boats and started in.

Once between Cutlass Sprit and the mainland it was more than ever apparent that the buccaneers had had the best of it when molested. Upon the south shore of the mainland, at the top of a steep hill, they had built a heavy log fort, from the portholes of which a half dozen black muzzles still protruded.

These effectually commanded the whole lower, or southern, half of Hangman's Bay. You could sail into this lower bay around either end of Cutlass Sprit; by passing between the Sprit and the southwestern corner of the island, called Bowsprit Bluff, if you rounded the western end, or by passing between it and Kidd's Neck, if you selected the longer and nar-

rower entrance to eastward; but in either case those guns raked you fore and aft.

After entering the lower harbor, there was still another passage to navigate before the upper part of the bay was reached. This passage was about one-eighth of a mile wide, nearly a mile long, and lay between Kidd's Neck and the mainland. It twisted tortuously from the lower bay toward the north-east.

The eastern side of the upper harbor was formed by the long, narrow neck, or spit, which lay between the bay and the east end of Cutlass Sprit; and it was so narrow and twisted that it really did suggest the probable appearance of Kidd's neck after his drop from the gallows at Execution Dock.

Once you worked through the passage, you found yourself in a safe retreat, about a mile wide and three miles or so in length. Tall trees on the ridges of Kidd's Neck completely screened you from the view of those at sea, while from Tops'l Hill, rising not far from the northern end, you could scan the horizon at all points of the compass.

We picked up a bit of breeze to help us going in, and by noon observation were well within the sheltered cove. There we saw how the buccaneers had further prepared themselves for defense, as well as a long stay ashore in case of need.

Emptying into the harbor, from the northwest, was a shallow creek. Just beyond this the north shore started its curve across the upper end of the inlet. Two hundreds yards or more to eastward of the creek mouth was a cleared slope, and on this, some distance inland, they had thrown up a palisade and blockhouse. Aside from the weeds that had grown round the stumps, the

log house appeared to be in fairly good shape.

IT was near the mouth of this creek in the upper harbor that Captain Bradbury decided to beach the Vulture, while we found a suitable spot some distance to southward, on the same—or western—side of the harbor. Off these respective points the two ships came to anchor, to wait for the tide; and immediately Captain Bradbury was rowed to the Bonny Lee, bringing Lieutenant Abercrombie with him.

"Bring that prisoner Bellew and the man Andrews here," he told a soldier when he came on deck.

"Now what?" muttered Cap'n Fogg under his breath.

"I've found that these two men are handier, as riggers, than any of my own seamen," Bradbury told Fogg, when the two convicts appeared. "I'll take 'em ashore with me to look those trees over."

When the Vulture's gig was finally beached, the sailors at the oars remained aboard. Captain Bradbury, Lieutenant Abercrombie, the mate Downes and the two convicts, Bellew and Andrews, went ashore. They disappeared at once into the thick trees.

"Something odd in that!" muttered Cap'n Fogg.

"Well, maybe not, sir," said Dick. "Long Tom and Horse Andrews certainly are good riggers."

"Doubtless. What interest has Abercrombie got in rigging, though?"

Dick's answer was a shrug; and Bradbury's exploring party was ashore over two hours, before it returned.

"Well, we found suitable pines," Bradbury declared, quite jovially. "So I'll refit the Vulture."

But our own plight was not mate-

rially bettered. Save for Bellew and Andrews, the prisoners aboard us were to remain at our disposal, under the same guard, until we were fit for sea. In the meantime the remaining prisoners and the Vulture's crew of nineteen would be put to felling trees and working them down the slope with peavies, while camps would be pitched ashore. "After you've loaded, though," Captain Bradbury said bluntly, "you'll stay here till the Vulture is fit for sea."

"And then?" said Cap'n Fogg.

"It shouldn't be more than three weeks afore the Vulture is ready. Then I'll put some o' my hands aboard you, and some o' these prisoners, with a guard. From here we'll sail smack in to Kingston, and I'll turn you and your precious cargo over to the governor of Jamaica."

"Ha!" snorted Cap'n Fogg, as soon as the Britisher had gone. "That clears the decks. We'll strike as soon as we've refloated."

CHAPTER VIII.

REBELLION.

THAT afternoon both ships were beached, and propped on even keels. Camps on the yellow sands were pitched under the shade of palms and white tarpaulins. I noted that the women, in the Vulture's camp, had been given the task of cooking, and were somewhat isolated from the men, and I was all for slipping down there, under cover of darkness.

"Miss Leigh can tell me a lot about which of these convicts are to be trusted not to inform," I argued to Cap'n Fogg.

"And if you get caught, they'll put you in irons," he returned. "We need all we can trust when we strike."

Forced to recognize the common sense in his stand, I gained some contentment in the thought that Gwendolyn was at least enjoying the contrast with those horrible quarters aboard the Vulture; and so I plunged into the work at hand, afire with eagerness to hasten the day of her release.

From the time we landed, the work progressed steadily. By day the harbor was alive with the chock of axes, or the sound of hammers within our hull, or the "Yo-ho-ho!" of lusty tars hauling away at block and falls. At night the camp fires cast their cheery glow out across the tranquil waters, and songfests were in order at both camps. No more lovely spot could have been found to come ashore in.

Even the convicts were elated. Their gloom perceptibly lessened; their cheeks showed more color; they looked improved in every way.

Moreover, we were living like kings, on mangos and wild bananas, sweet yams and turtles' eggs and fresh fish; we likewise bagged some fresh wild hog meat, and venison, and enjoyed a liberal ration of grog; and under such conditions, we made headway so rapidly that we saw our way clear on the fifth day to refloat that night, if all went well.

THE highest tide did not come to flood that evening until after dark. Captain Bradbury, being anxious to place all hands at work on the Vulture, had been agreeable to our reloading by lighters as soon as we had launched. It was then we were to strike; and as the hour approached, I labored under an excitement so tense that I feared my very nervousness would give the Britishers warning.

But Dick seemed not in the least worried. He had confided, he said, in

none of the convicts save his old shipmates; and, nothing occurring to delay us, six bells—eleven o'clock—found the Bonny Lee again riding at anchor, some two hundred yards off shore.

The lighters were alongside, the bales and boxes which we had removed from the forehold were once more on deck and in the process of being lowered through the hatch. Ten convicts were below, acting as stevedores, under Cap'n Fogg. Eight were on deck, slinging boxes. Dick was in charge there, and with him were Tom Newgate, Abe Kemp, Coffin and the dwarf Bruno. I stood near by, lantern and manifest in hand.

Sergeant Holmes had brought all six of his squad aboard. Two of these soldiers were on watch—one on deck, and one below, with Cap'n Fogg. Sergeant Holmes lolled beside the starboard rail, smoking a pipe; the other four soldiers had been allowed to stretch out on some tarpaulins under the foremast boom.

All round the island it was very quiet. Only a few coals remained of the camp fires ashore. Apparently all of Bradbury's camp were sunk in slumber save a lone sentry who paced slowly back and forth past the tarpaulins under which the convicts slept. In the east the moon was rising, its round edge just peeking up over the tree tops which stood so dark and still on the plateau at the base of Tops'l Hill.

It had been agreed that Dick was to give the signal; and at last I saw him covertly nudge Bruno. The dwarf was behind his master, and the sleepy sentry facing the mate. Behind Dick's back I saw his fingers conveying a message to the dwarf.

Bruno immediately picked up a rope and started coiling it. Meanwhile he

moved nearer Sergeant Holmes. Then said Dick:

"Ah! We'll soon be ashore now, my lads. Here's but another slingload to go below."

"A good thing it is, too," growled Holmes.

At that moment Dick leaped full upon the sentry. The stupid ruffian's heavy flintlock was whipped from his lax hands so swiftly that he could but gape and stare.

Simultaneously the dwarf was upon Holmes like a catamount, throwing the heavy coil of rope about the man's arms and shoulders. A hairy paw nipped Holmes's startled cry in the bud, and brought him crashing to the deck.

In the same breath Dick was saying, in low clear tones:

"If you so much as stir, my lad, you're sunk. Coffin, truss up this swab, Tom, get the others' muskets, and lively."

I had leaped to aid Tom Newgate in snatching the muskets of the sentries who now stirred on the tarpaulins; there was a scuffle below; and in a brace of shakes we had the situation in hand. It had been surprisingly easy—so far.

CHAPTER IX.

TO THE ATTACK.

"ALL'S well below!" Cap'n Fogg called up to us.

"All's shipshape here—or soon will be," Dick returned. "Lively now, lads. Remember, you redcoats—let me hear one of you sing out, and you'll hear the echo in hell. Gag 'em, lads, and truss 'em well." Then he wheeled on Bruno, who still crouched above Holmes's slack form. "Let go there, Bruno, and truss the man."

Bruno reluctantly released his grip

on Holmes's throat, and arose, as Cap'n Fogg popped on deck.

Some of the convicts had not been taken into the plot, but those on deck were not slow to grasp the situation. One of the London criminals snarled and pushed Coffin aside, smashing at the bound sentry's head with a belaying pin. The soldier, he whose heavy boots had crushed the Irishman, O'Shaughnessy's ribs, flopped to the deck with a broken skull.

His fall was followed in a flash by that of the convict. Cap'n Fogg had seized a musket from the sentry below, and with it he had felled the prisoner.

"That's what I'll deal out to him who murders except in fair fight!" he gritted, glaring about him like a wolf at bay. "Now mark my words, the lot of you: I'll set you free, as I've agreed, but you'll remain as hands before the mast till I've clapped you somewhere safe ashore in the colonies. There'll be no settling of old scores, unless we find a fight on our hands ashore. Below now, and lively to knock off irons."

"Aye, aye, sir," returned some of the former seamen, promptly.

We found a key in the sergeant's pocket, and soon released the eager, excited prisoners from their irons.

"NOW, men," said Cap'n Fogg, when one of the boxes of muskets had been broken open, and cutlasses and pistols brought, ready to be served round, "I've a thing or two to say. Makes no odds how we do it—every man we have to kill here will be charged against us by the British authorities as another murder. Amen, so be it. But I'm acting strictly because I'm in a clove hitch, and doing what I think is right. Not a dollar's worth of dunnage do I plan to take off

that Vulture. That's flat. Not a man do I plan to kill except that fighting may make it necessary. Is that all clear?"

"Aye, aye, sir," growled Hardy Flintlock. "It's fair enow. Only, we've had main hard treatment for a bit o' smuggling—asking your pardon."

"I'll grant that. And I'll say this: if we're successful in taking the other camp, you can bring any of those soldiers before me for trial as you have just charges against. But fair trial they'll get, and don't mistake me."

"That's fair enow," repeated Hardy.

"Then," said the skipper, "point out to me any informer here that you fear may give warning before we get there."

Without hesitation several of Hardy's old messmates pointed to one man. He whined and protested, but was gagged and bound, and left aboard with the soldiers, for safe keeping. Abe Kemp and Jerry Coffin were left to guard them.

With this done we took to the boats. Five of us were from the Bonny Lee's old crew; and our numbers had been swelled by seventeen convicts, so that we now boasted of twenty-two.

Nevertheless we took no chances, and once ashore, moved toward the sleeping camp with extreme care, keeping well within the trees. When finally opposite the convicts' tarpaulin, Hardy Flintlock and a companion crawled forward.

The sentry was at the north end of the camp. Hardy and his mate safely reached the shelter of some bushes near the southern end of his beat. When the soldier wheeled and started trudging slowly toward the two, they crouched low and waited, motionless.

At last the slowly moving soldier

reached the end of his beat. When he wheeled in his stiff military fashion to retrace his steps northward, Hardy and his mate leaped.

The man's musket was discharged with a thunderous report. It set the echoes to crashing back and forth across the quiet bay.

But the shot went harmlessly into the air. Under Hardy's musket stock the sentry came down with a crash like that of a felled bullock.

He had not struck the ground when Dick roared out from the depths of his mighty chest, "Over the side, all-l-l-l hands!"

It was a signal for a charge that swept toward the camp like maddened bulls.

CHAPTER X.

WITH GUN AND CUTLASS.

STRETCHING from north to south along the shore of the harbor the sleeping Britishers lay as follows: Captain Bradbury under tarpaulins with Downes and two other mates, also Lieutenant Abercrombie and Beau Tyron, at the northern end; next, the Vulture's crew of nineteen tars; then the other eight infantrymen of Abercrombie's command; adjoining them those convicts not allotted to the task of repairing our Bonny Lee; and the women at the extreme southern end of the camp.

We were stretched out in a line parallel to the camp, and facing eastward. Tiger Dick had been given command of a group on our left, facing Bradbury's headquarters; Cap'n Fogg had the center, which was to fall on the British sailors; and old Tom Newgate led the right flank, heading for the sleeping soldiers.

The discharge of the sentry's musket had roused all hands, and before we crossed the space between the trees and the camp, a number of the British sailors and soldiers had started up, weapons in hand.

In the bright moonlight I saw at least two of the sailors and three of the soldiers raising their pistols or muskets to fire—when suddenly I stumbled over a rope and pitched headlong.

That action was swift. Before I could arise several shots reëchoed across the lagoon. Savage yells, choked curses, and the screams of frightened women rent the air.

I was in Cap'n Fogg's squad, and leaped to my feet in time to see a comrade fall upon a British sailor who faced him with upraised cutlass. Before the cutlass fell a shot struck the sailor full in the breast. He dropped his weapon, clutched at his breast, and slowly toppled upon another British tar who was struggling to free himself from a tangle of blankets.

At the same time Cap'n Fogg was crying: "Throw down your arms, you fools—the game's up!"

Before I had taken three strides this seemed to be apparent to the majority of the British tars, still fuddled and dazed with sleep. Most of them threw down their arms, or, caught in blankets, made no attempt to defend themselves, raising their hands instead and calling for quarter.

The soldiers were caught in like predicament. Those who resisted were rushed by groups of convicts, who fell upon them with the fury of tigers.

The cries for quarter from the remaining soldiers rose even higher than the fearful screams of pain; but over and above all I could hear the voices of Dick and Captain Bradbury, at the north end of the camp.

"Throw down your arms!" roared Tiger Dick.

"To hell with you!" thundered the British skipper, his pistol vomiting flame and smoke.

There were no cries for quarter there. Bruno, Hardy Flintlock and a half dozen of our released convicts found the Vulture's three mates and Abercrombie, the lieutenant, upon their feet, ready with cutlasses and blazing pistols.

Two of the convicts fell, and one of the mates went down; then Dick's cutlass met that of Captain Bradbury's with a slithering crash, and the men behind him rushed upon their old enemies with oaths to chill the blood.

The terrific cut aimed by Tiger Dick at the British skipper snapped off the Englishman's blade as though it had been a match stick. Bradbury bellowed in fury and tried to close, but Hardy Flintlock brought the oxlike figure to its knees with a smashing, downward blow that bit through the shoulder to the breastbone.

As another of the other Britishers fell upon Dick, Hardy Flintlock and Bruno, the dwarf, hacked ferociously at the wounded Bradbury. Such utter viciousness I had never before witnessed. They lopped off one of his arms, split his head, and slashed him in a dozen other places.

Dead he must have been before he toppled like a heavy oak, yet they were leaping upon him and continuing to hack at his bloody remains when I reached Cap'n Fogg.

ALL resistance in our immediate vicinity had by this time ceased, and Cap'n Fogg started on the run toward the combatants to northward, calling on three of us to follow. We had barely started when the last of

Bradbury's officers fell. Bradbury was, of course, stone dead; so were all three mates; and Lieutenant Abercrombie was unconscious and bleeding from a dozen wounds when we came up.

Dick had subsided on a camp stool, panting heavily and wiping the perspiration from his face. Tyron was struggling in the arms of two of the convicts. They were berating him for a fool, and cautioning him to cease resisting, when Bruno snarled horribly and leaped at him, cutlass raised.

"Avast there!" cried Cap'n Fogg, tripping the dwarf. He aimed a pistol at the same time.

"This man," Fogg continued, indicating Tyron, "is disarmed. Let me see him who'll lay a hand on him!"

Bruno growled menacingly, but subsided; but a commotion near by caused the skipper to wheel. There was Hardy Flintlock moving toward an English sailor who stood with his arms aloft. Hardy was a fearful figure. He was spattered with blood; he seemed fairly drunk with it; he breathed stertorously and staggered heavily in his ungainly stride.

"Quarter!" pleaded the frightened tar.

"Quarter!" Hardy thickly mocked him. "Ah," he went on, in a sort of singsong, "'but the quarter that we gave them was to sink them in the sea!'"

With that he struck a murderous blow at the head of the defenseless man.

This was the signal for a stampede among the Vulture's crew. The intended victim dodged and ran for his life. Hardy started after him; others among the released convicts selected victims against whom they had grudges, and gave pursuit; and in a twinkling of an eye the most depraved of the rascals

under Fogg's command would have been completely out of hand.

The skipper stood not on ceremony. He raised the pistol and let fly with one barrel, aiming straight at Hardy. The bullet burned the blackguard's tattooed forearm. Away went his cutlass, knocked from his numbed fingers. He stopped dead in his tracks. Slowly he turned toward Fogg, a silly, shocked, incredulous expression on his heavy blue face.

It brought the rest of the mutineers up standing, as well.

For a second there was dead silence.

"I didn't mean that shot for your hand, either!" declared the skipper, his voice cutting through the air like a knife. "Next man cuts down an unarmed prisoner will swing at the yard-arm before his cutlass is dry!"

Black looks and muttered curses greeted him on all sides, save from a bare handful of our new crew; but Cap'n Fogg quickly improved the situation by summoning to him Tom Newgate and four of our convicts who appeared to be honest, sober and wholesome fellows. Then he called out: "This way, all you men off the Vulture!"

The white-faced Englishmen were quick to obey, and Cap'n Fogg struck another blow while the iron was hot.

"Every man Jack of my crew this way to stack arms!" he commanded.

THOUGH frowning and looking sidewise at one another, our crew started coming up, one after another. With them they brought their own and the captured weapons. The four honest fellows and Tom Newgate were told their arms were to be retained, and that they were to stand guard over the muskets and cutlasses till further orders.

All this time the women and those among the male convicts who were still in irons had remained in their tents. I was anxious to speak to Gwendolyn, but, the skipper directing me to aid with the wounded, I could not go at once.

In addition to Bradbury and his officers, two of the soldiers would never speak again. There were also six wounded—Abercrombie, a sailor, one soldier, and three of our convicts. With these last I fell to work.

Dick had moved over beside the captain by this time, and at a request from the mate the two stepped away, but not so far that I could not catch their low words.

"If I might suggest it, sir, I would not be too brisk with these lads just now." Dick nodded at our men, who, at the captain's orders, were sullenly gathering wood to stoke up the fires. "They've been hazed a long time, sir. Now, a bit of fling till morning won't do them—and us—no harm."

"I suppose not."

"If I might make another suggestion, sir," Dick resumed, "I'd tie up those swabs from the Vulture's crew, along with them sojers, and clap 'em under hatches aboard the Bonny Lee."

The skipper approved of this as a good suggestion. He didn't want to leave the Vulture's crew ashore while the Bonny Lee was getting under weigh; there was the fort overlooking the lower harbor to think of.

"Once outside, I'll send 'em back ashore," he said. "I'd sail to-night, by gum, if there was a capful o' wind. There isn't, so I'll let the men have their little fling. You may tell off some of the hands, Mr. Buntline, to take our prisoners aboard the Bonny Lee. Truss them and leave Kemp, Coffin, and"—here his eye roved over our new crew—

"that man there to guard 'em." He indicated a convict who appeared to have been a landsman.

"Aye, aye, sir," responded Dick.

In a jiffy Dick had told off a half dozen of our men, handed them muskets, and marched away to the boats with the captives. They included Tyron, sixteen sailors, and the remaining soldiers.

The sailor and soldier being only slightly wounded, I had sent them along with Dick, and was attending to a more serious cut in the arm, suffered by one of the convicts, when four men brought Abercrombie in a blanket. I saw that there was no hope for him. But he had regained consciousness and was struggling to speak.

"I'm listening," Cap'n Fogg assured him, bending over the dying man.

"Treasure!" gasped the wounded lieutenant. "There's treachery here. Treasure—"

Here his eyes filmed, his throat filled, and he died.

CHAPTER XI.

DANGEROUS UNDERCURRENTS.

"NOW, what the devil do you make of that?" muttered Cap'n Fogg, straightening up. He removed his wig and scratched his bald head.

"There was something afoot, sir, I'll be bound," volunteered one of the more honest-looking convicts. "The whole ship was puzzled about it."

"You mean because Bradbury changed course, my man?"

"That's it, sir. I wouldn't wonder but what there *was* treasure here, sir, this being a pirate's hang-out."

"Does any one here know anything about it?" Fogg demanded.

All the surrounding faces appeared

blank or wore an air of reserve. Near by, on the sloping shore, Dick and his captives had been about to embark in the Vulture's boats; but they were within earshot of our fire, and now Dick returned briskly toward us, his eager eyes fastened upon the skipper's face.

"Did I hear something about treasure, sir?" he asked politely.

Cap'n Fogg repeated Abercrombie's dying words.

"So!" Dick said slowly, after digesting this. He smiled skeptically. "Well, Cap'n Bradbury's dead now, and gone below: he knows by now he came on a wild-goose chase, and you may lay to it."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, sir, maybe some one's sung Cap'n Bradbury a song of treasure here. A chucklehead as had never run across a gentleman o' fortune might easily believe they stowed their blunt on places like this. Only, them as I have seen ashore, in places like Porto Bello, why, they wasn't the lads to save, not them. A coach and six, and a hogshhead o' rum beside the driver, and to sea again in rags. That was their style; easy come and easy go; and if ever any of them swabs ever buried blunt, it was because they was close pressed."

"My opinion, too," Cap'n Fogg instantly replied. He addressed the men. "We sail on the morning tide, men, if there's a bit of wind. After you've buried the dead, you can broach a cask of rum." Here he was interrupted by a cheer. "Mr. Newgate," indicating old Tom, "will be recognized from now on as second mate. You'll tell off men to bury the dead and release those poor lads who are still in chains, Mr. Newgate. And, Mr. Buntline, you'll bring back dungarees from the slop

chest for these men who'll want to chuck these convict togs."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Dick; while old Tom, apparently unable to believe his ears, rubbed his chin and stared almost stupidly.

"You meant as I'm to be second officer, sir?" he gasped.

"Exactly, Mr. Newgate."

"Well, I—" old Tom stammered. "Well, I— Well, t h a n k e e kindly, sir."

"And now," Cap'n Fogg said briskly, nodding for me to follow, and addressing Dick, "I've a word to say to that man Tyron."

We three started down the beach toward the boats. "You took the right lay, Mr. Buntline," the skipper said quickly, in low tones. "While there may be something in that treasure yarn, we'd have a mutiny, like as not, if the men believed it."

"Just what I spoke up for, sir," Dick quickly responded.

THERE was no chance for further words, since we drew near the waiting captives. Among them, though a little to one side, stood Beau Tyron, caressing his chin moodily. He gave us an ugly frown.

"You are an officer on leave, I understand," said Cap'n Fogg.

"An army captain—yes. What of it?"

"This of it: give me your parole, and I'll give you the use of a cabin aboard the Bonny Lee till I set you back ashore."

"Perhaps you think you can bribe me to be a witness when you're in court for piracy and murder," Tyron sourly returned. "You'll get no parole from me. If I see a chance to lay you by the heels, that's what I'll do, my man."

"So be it," returned Fogg, not

without a trace of admiration. He directed Dick to proceed, and took me off a short distance down the beach. Giving me one of the sergeant's keys, with which to release the women, he added:

"You see how things are, my lad. I've had to take hide with tallow, and which is good honest tallow in that mess of broad-arrow swabs, I've had to take snap judgment on. You talk to that girl. There's a knowing, observant girl, or I'm mistaken." He removed his hat and wig, and rubbed his head. "I don't mind confessing it, son—I'm worried."

"Captain," I said, "I've something to tell you." And I told him Jed Morgan's story.

He listened intently to the end. "I don't like that," he said. "I'll give Dick the benefit of the doubt, though. The man had the best of recommendations from the port captain of Liverpool. We will keep a bright lookout, however. Quick, now, and learn what you can."

Off I went, as briskly as you please, and my heart thumping. Some one had already released the remaining prisoners, and three of the women were dancing with men upon the sand, while others laughed and shouted incoherently, the men whirling their irons round their heads and throwing them out into the water. Still others were weeping tears of joy and seizing this hand and that to shake in their ecstasy. Even the men at work on the graves were shouting in glee.

I found Gwendolyn sitting quietly under a tarpaulin. "I've been waiting for you to come," she said simply, holding out a slender hand. She shook mine, much as a boy might have done, letting her eyes, rather than effusive words, express her gratitude and joy at her release.

There were any number of things I wanted to say, but time was pressing, and perforce I stated my mission, and told her of the attack and our plans. She at once accompanied me to a point near by, from which we could see most of the figures near the roaring fires, upon which some were tossing wood.

"Why Captain Bradbury came here is a mystery to me," she said. "But this I know: among the convicts I would trust—well, not more than ten of the men."

These she named and pointed out, after which we went to the captain's fire, not far from the bows of the *Vulture*. All the new crew, save the guard set over the weapons, had foregathered round two fires that were blazing some distance to northward.

SHORTLY the skipper and Tom Newgate returned from reading a prayer over the dead, and I gave them her opinions.

"That's good," said Cap'n Fogg. "I will see that those hands are told off to relieve the guard."

Casting an eye over our carousing, excited crew, he nodded at me reassuringly. They were roaring a chorus which ran:

"Now, when my t'other leg was lopped.
Well, for a bit o' fun,
With it in hand, why up I hopped,
And rammed it in a gun.
'Now what's that for?' cried Seaman
Dick,
Says I, 'Blow high, blow low,
We'll give the lubbers one more kick!
Yo ho, and the rum below!"

"They seem contented enough now," said the skipper. "I'll see those men, and then snatch a wink of sleep while Mr. Newgate takes the watch." And he looked at me kindly. "If you want to take a walk, young man, you may."

I know that I blushed, but when I looked at Gwendolyn she was eyeing me quite calmly. She seemed, indeed, to be faintly amused at my evident embarrassment.

"I'm not particularly interested in watching *that*," she said, nodding at the carousing figures around the distant fires. "And so I'd as leave take your arm, sir."

So we left the skipper's fire, and found a sheltered spot in the edge of the trees, some distance to south'ard of the convict ship's dark bows.

While I was all eagerness and plied her with a myriad questions, she was a very contained, calm girl that night, though now and again I felt her dark eyes slyly inspecting my profile, and occasionally saw her smile.

Her low voice thrilled me. This I made no attempt to hide; but as the minutes sped away, and we talked of Virginia, the night's attack, our chances of freedom, and what not, she continually shunted me away from personalities. And this so nettled me that finally I fell into a glum silence.

"Come!" she chuckled. "You're thinking that I'm ungrateful, perhaps, because I don't fall on your neck in return for your kindness. Well—"

"Kindness?" I cried. My eyes blazed my delight in the soft curves of her smooth cheeks, the exquisite lips, the dark, intelligent eyes, the thick, wavy tresses that held such alluring lights and intoxicated me with their subtle perfume. "It wasn't just kindness I was showing you!" I exploded. "Why, from the moment I saw you—"

"Please don't!" she interrupted.

"You mean there is something else?" I cried.

She laughed low. "No," she returned. "I'm just not keen over wear-

ing the ball and chain your sex expects mine to put on. You're an impulsive, generous soul, Ned Allen, and you've seen me in a situation that would—well, rather color things for you. And honestly"—she smiled teasingly—"you'll find, for one thing, that I've a deucedly rotten temper."

"I'd risk it," I promptly assured her.

But she shook her head, and at the same time was smiling provokingly at me from under her long lashes, when we heard some one approaching. It was still dark, though daylight was drawing near, and I did not recognize the man till he called in a low, cautious voice:

"Hey, Ned Allen! Are you there, Ned?"

It was old Tom Newgate.

I answered him, and he hurried to us.

"I've got to speak," he panted, wiping nervously at his broad face, which was perspiring with fear or excitement. "And Tiger Dick mought suspect suthin' if I was to wake the cap'n and take him aside. It's you as will have to tell Cap'n Fogg as there's murder afoot, and worse."

The deadly chill of terror laid a cold and heavy hand upon my heart. My voice sounded strained and unnatural as I cried in a low tone:

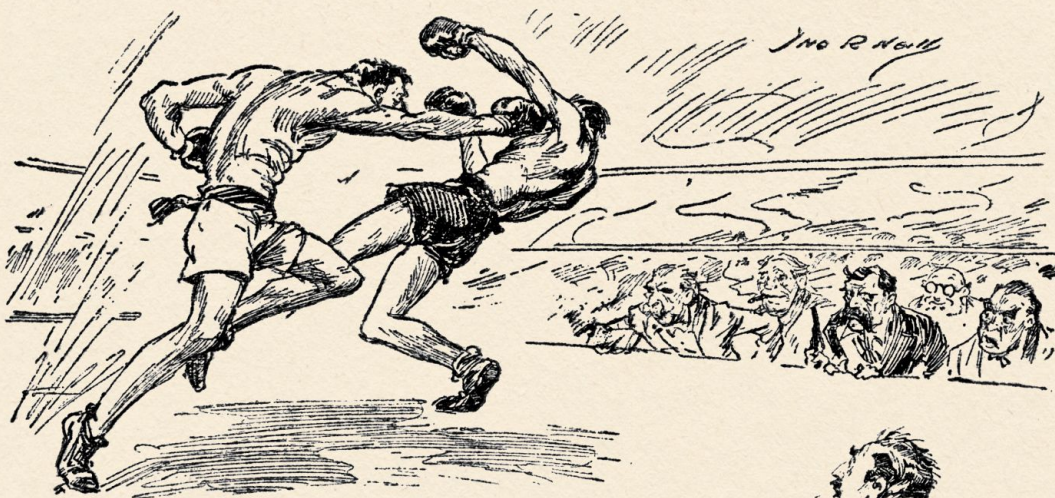
"You mean there's mutiny afoot, because of that treasure yarn?"

"It ain't no yarn, but plain fact—worse luck!" he hoarsely assured me.

"What?" I gasped. "There's treasure here?"

"There is, and no mistake! It's Tiger Dick and them swabs as I once sailed with on the old pirate ship Typhoon as means to get it, too. They aims to slash every honest throat and put to sea with the blunt!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



He catches Cotter-Pin on the button and drops him like a felled ox



Cotter-Pin Davis, Pug

When he dons ring tights at this woolly Rocky Mountain hamlet, Dan Webster's palooka is torn between love, honesty, and a desire to keep unpunctured

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

COTTER-PIN DAVIS is a lanky, loose-jointed kid with freckled face and a pair of handle-bar ears, red as the stop-lights on Main Street. He's likable and as friendly as a mustard-colored pup without a home. At times he can fight real good.

Yet I've had Davis in tow four months and I can't figure him out. At Cheyenne he outpoints the Wyoming Windmill, one of the best in his division, and then knocks him cold as an Eskimo's nose. But he takes a decision over Joe Fennelly, who ain't near as good.

And then we go down to Missoula, Montana, to pick up some easy dough, and a hunky named Slovensky that never won a fight in his life bats Cotter-Pin all over the ring, and slaps my

erratic fist-slinger to the mat in the sixth.

That's a load of what I'm up against: put Cotter-Pin in the roped arena with a good guy and he is a marvel. On his toes, alert. Stack him against a stumblebum that should of been a push-over and he relaxes. The top layer won't fight him, and he can't lick the others.

We're ridin' a rattler across the Idaho Panhandle, and I've made up my mind I got to ditch the poor speckle-faced onion. The thought has me feelin' so low I could walk under a snake's belly on stilts.

"Bill," I says to Cotter-Pin, "I'm sorry, but you've fought your last fight under the guidance and management of Dan Webster. When we get to Spo-

kane, Washington, you're through. Maybe you can get a job greasin' trucks."

Bill looks up, sad as a kid bein' sent to the dentist on Saturday afternoon.

"Aw, Dan," he says, "I can fight."

"Why don't you, then?" I demands.

"Why did you let that section-gang Polack lay you out in the third round last night? You had him way out-classed."

"He was too easy for me," Bill tries to explain. "Besides, he told me my shoestring was untied, and—"

I let out a howl; and then a fellow behind taps me on the shoulder.

"**P**ARDON me," says the stranger. "I couldn't help overhearin' your conversation. Is your companion a prize fighter?"

"He thinks he is," I concede.

"The man I'm lookin' for, then," goes on the stranger. With that, he unfolds his scenario.

His name is Ike Paddleford. "I own and operate the Pleasure Palace at Aurabelle," he confesses, movin' up on the edge of his seat. "It's the only amusement hall in the place. The town was dead for a long time, but there's been a gold boom lately. Lots of excitement. People are flockin' in from all over the country; and my stereopticon slides of Niagara Falls—even the ones that ain't cracked—ain't drawin' the crowds they did thirty years ago."

"They wouldn't," I agree.

The ex-sheriff hands me a dirty look; and I get a fine chance to see what cold gray eyes he has. Also the sharp, hawklike beak, the shrewd, harsh lines about his mouth.

"I've just been east to Butte, tryin' to import some talent," Paddleford goes on. "I wanted to get a few vaudeville acts and maybe a burlesque

show, but there's nothin' doin' till next month. Meantime, a couple of good prize fights ought to draw a handsome gate. Money in your pocket, money in mine. What do you say to bringin' your man to Aurabelle?"

"Nix," I says, having a hunch that somebody in Denmark has left the lid off of the royal garbage can.

"Gee, Dan!" pipes up Cotter-Pin. "It's a chance. Gimme it—just this one more."

Paddleford is lookin' him over. "Say, ain't you the boy that kayoed the Wyoming Windmill up in Cheyenne?"

"Yep, that's me," admits Cotter-Pin.

"H'm!" Ike smiles his wise-guy smile. "The opponent I've got picked will be a pushover. He's a ham, untrained. An Aurabelle product. A miner, popular among the boys at home. About your size. A little heavier-built perhaps, but absolutely without skill or science."

Boy, I knew it was comin'! The only guys in the world Cotter-Pin can't lick are pushovers. I give a groan and start to say somethin'.

"Tut-tut," tuts Ike. "Don't pull that we-can't-win stuff on me; you ain't no football coach. I know the trick—you don't want to run the odds up." He leans over and lowers his voice. "And I'll know where to put my money, too."

I don't say a word. I got a feelin' that we'll tangle with trouble in Aurabelle. Funny, ain't it?—because I ain't even heard of Liz yet. I'm still hesitatin' on acceptin' Ike's offer when the train grinds to a halt. Paddleford grabs me and Cotter-Pin.

"Come on, boys! Here's where we get out. It's all settled, ain't it?"

One look at Cotter-Pin, and I'm sunk. He ain't sayin' anythin', but his

whole expression is a mute appeal for another chance in the ring. I decide to let him have it, for better or for worse.

A LOT of people get off the train. Ike leaves me and Bill Davis standin' on the platform. Up ahead there's a bunch of men millin' around a pile of baggage sortin' out their camp stuff, minin' equipment, shovels, supplies. Everybody is rushin' around, jostlin' one another, jokin' and cursin'.

Immediately me and Bill are the center of a commotion. A gang of natives start to pull us this way and that. They're all shoutin':

"Cheapest fare to Aurabelle! Ride the Gray Line to the new gold camp!"

"Ride the Blue Line! Fastest time to the gold fields!"

"Say, ain't this Aurabelle?" I ask a red-faced bozo with a brace of six-guns crisscrossed over his hips.

"It ain't!" he snaps. "This is Logan Point, the nearest rail connection. Aurabelle's back yonder 'bout three looks and a throw." He points toward the towering backbone of the Bitter Root Mountains. I ain't much for scenery, but them tall hills all covered with pine and tamarack hand me a thrill.

We're bein' kidnaped for the trip to Aurabelle at thirty bucks apiece when Paddleford, his frock coat flyin' in the breeze, muscles his way through the transportation pirates. They fall back docile. Obviously Ike's a big shot in the home territory even if he ain't the sheriff any more. He leads us over to an ancient flivver and hops into the seat behind the wheel.

Aurabelle is a bustlin' beehive of activity. A ghost town come to life. Wooden shacks with false fronts line

the main thoroughfare. The street is crowded, but that don't mean a thing to a mountain-going driver like Ike. He coasts right up to the Palace Hotel, overshoots the mark by a barber shop and the post office because his brakes ain't workin' very good, and finally comes to a halt.

"I own it," he says, indicatin' the hotel. "Go right in. Liz'll fix you up with a room. I'll come over later."

LIZ! Sounds like one of them wiry, raw-boned frontier females, don't it? Well, what a surprise Liz turned out to be! Comin' right on top of the thrashing ride over the mountains from Logan Point, it all but knocks Cotter-Pin and me silly.

She's sweet and pretty as a girl on a New Year's calendar. Fresh as May flowers. The big cities may think they have somethin' in the way of feminine pulchritude, but they never lamped Liz. Moreover, when you get a girl that's smart as well as good-lookin' you're up against somethin' interestin'. What she ever seen in Bill Davis, I don't know. I never asked her. It wouldn't of done no good.

Bill falls the minute he sees her there behind the dilapidated desk. Liz hands me a key and turns the register around. Then she dips a pen in the inkwell and holds it out. Cotter-Pin, mouth open, just stands there starin'; so I sign for both of us.

"What's the matter?" says the beautiful creature, embarrassed by Cotter-Pin's imitation of a dyin' fish. "Is my hair coming down, or have I a smudge on my nose?"

"No, ma'am!" blurts Bill, his face turnin' crimson. In a kind of panic he reaches for my arm and hurries me to the stairs. As we gain them there's a faint tinkle of silvery laughter.

Next mornin' I read the official riot act to Cotter-Pin. This Jim Linden, I tell him, is one palooka he's got to lick like a cat takin' cream. I even promise that if he knocks the miner kickin' I'll again undertake to lead him through the stony paths of fistiana to ultimate glory. Cotter-Pin listens solemn as a child. He swears he'll make out he's fightin' a champ.

Still, somethin's on his mind. I give myself two guesses—both of them are "Liz."

In the afternoon I arrange the final details with Ike Paddleford. The ex-sheriff proves shrewd as a shyster lawyer. I also get a chance to look over Jim Linden trainin'; he's a husky lad, but not supple. Too muscle-bound to be fast and dangerous. A regular backwoods product, with a flat nose and a plain, round, well-fed face.

I'm busy then until the day before the fight. That mornin' Ike slips into my room. He's sportin' a gay pearl-handled .45, which he seems mighty proud of as he stands over by the door and looks at me hard. I'm alone in the room.

"There won't be any slip-up, of course," he says firmly. But I don't get what he's drivin' at.

"You know what I mean!" snaps Ike, impatiently. "If this fight is honest there can't be any question of Davis not winnin'."

"Well, now," I says; "a fight's a fight. Even the under dog has a chance."

"Don't pull that stuff on me!" snarls Ike. "A lot of prominent citizens—friends of mine—have placed money on this fight. They believe the fight is on the level, and unless an experienced man like Davis, with fine victories to his credit, trims the Linden boy to a fare-you-well I shall be forced to one

conclusion. Namely, that you slickers have attempted to put somethin' over on honest country people."

"Say, listen—"

Ike cuts me off.

"Haven't time!" barks the ex-sheriff. He lifts his gun half out of leather and slaps it back into the holster, significantly. "By the way, Mr. Webster," he says, makin' for the door; "my friends lynched the last man that tried to run a dishonest fight in Aurabelle. So long!"

HE leaves me gaspin'. I've seen a lot of smooth tricks pulled in the racket, but it took Ike, the ex-sheriff of Aurabelle, to show me a new one: fixin' a fight such a way that if it don't pan out as he wants the other guys get blamed for bein' dishonest. Knowin' what I do of Cotter-Pin's weakness, I gotta admit Paddleford has put me in a tough spot.

Of course, Bill may win—maybe the lynchin' threat which sounds too businesslike for comfort will help. Or I could maybe coax Linden to take a dive and save the day for Bill. The latter is out, I decide. After all, I ain't never framed a fight yet; and why let a hick politician make me? I've decided I'll trust to luck, when Cotter-Pin busts in. He's all hot and bothered.

"Dan!" he shouts. "Ike Paddleford is a dirty crook! Let me tell you about that fight to-morrow."

"You don't need to," I says. "Ike's been here."

Bill sits down on the bed and puts his head in his hands. "Dan," he mourns, lookin' up at me like somebody's stuck a knife in his heart and twisted it, "I can't win that fight. I love Liz."

"What!" I explodes. "Anyhow, what's the bon-bon got to do with it?"

"I thought you knew," says Bill. "Jim Linden is Liz's brother."

It's a surprise; but I don't know the half of it yet.

"Lots of girls has brothers in the fight game that get smacked around," I remarks, tryin' to be consoln'.

"It ain't that," moans Bill. "Paddleford's a dirty scoundrel." Between groans he explains.

It seems Liz and her brother Jim own a bit of minin' property that was left them when their pop died. They didn't think much of it until the new boom in Aurabelle gave it a sudden cash value. Paddleford's got a mortgage on the mine. He wants to foreclose, but he comes to the Linden kids as a friend and says he'll get a fight for Jim and that the lad's share of the proceeds ought to be enough to enable him to lift the mortgage.

Naturally, the boy falls for the stall. Then after he's all signed up he finds he's got to win the fight—his first appearance in the professional ring—to get enough jack to save the property. That ain't so bad; but then Paddleford carefully picks an opponent he's sure can lick the kid. It's a dirty trick.

Knowin' what I do about Cotter-Pin's luck with ham fighters, I'd of busted out laughin' at the boomerang Ike has planted for himself but for the ex-sheriff's little call earlier in the mornin', which don't make it sound so funny.

"Are you sure you love Liz?" I asks Bill. I'm tryin' to find some way out.

"Of course!" snaps Bill.

"Does she love you?"

"Uh-huh."

"Would she love you if you was hangin' from a telegraph pole?" I inquire.

"Of course not!" admits Bill, startled. "Why?"

So I tell him about Ike's visit. Bill moans some more, and we spend the rest of the day tryin' to figure which horn of the dilemma has got the blunter point.

JUST before the fight I have a long talk with Cotter-Pin. "Remember," I says, "you got to win. For your neck and mine."

Bill looks at me and gives me his mitt. He's game. But the sacrifice is makin' him miserable. He's wonderin' what Liz will think of him if he licks her brother.

The lights over the improvised ring ain't none too good, but the hall is packed with a shoutin', cheerin' mob. I spot Ike sittin' down in the front row where he can keep a close eye on the proceedin's. He's still wearin' his hardware.

The referee's brief announcement is greeted with acclaim. He backs away. Linden and Bill look at each other, shake, and break. The fracas is on, and each contestant has got more at stake than the customers realize. Bill has his neck to fight for; Jim Linden his property.

It promises to be a swell show.

Cotter-Pin leads off too anxious. He misses Linden with a left hook. Linden comes back with two lefts to the chin and backs Cotter-Pin into the ropes. The crowd cheers as the local boy hooks both hands to Cotter-Pin's head. Cotter-Pin manages to get away from the ropes.

He's twice as fast as Linden. He moves inside and keeps choppin' at Linden's head with short rights. Linden don't like it. He shoots a wild right to the jaw, misses. Cotter-Pin clips Linden on the mouth, drawin' first blood.

Linden's gettin' mad. He stands up

and swaps socks with my ex-automobile nurse.

Pow! Wham! Crack! The clouds land pretty evenly divided, until Linden snaps Cotter-Pin's head back with a sledge hammer straight left and smashes him to the ropes with a right to the jaw.

The bell.

It's Linden's round. I glance over at Ike. He's glowerin', and when he sees me lookin' at him, his hand falls easily to the butt of his revolver.

"Take it easy," I says to Cotter-Pin. "Linden's a rusher. Watch that he don't pop over a haymaker, but let him wear himself out and he'll be duck soup."

"Yeah," says Cotter-Pin. "Do you really think Paddleford meant it about that necktie party?"

The bell calls the boys to work again, and they fight like they been enemies all their lives. About the middle of the round, Cotter-Pin spots Liz sittin' on the opposite side of the ring from Ike.

A pained expression comes over his pan, a momentary distraction. Linden don't miss his chance. He slams Cotter-Pin a wow of a right on the kisser, and my boy stumbles and falls. He stays down for eight!

I'm scared to look at Ike. I've got the feel of a rope around my neck already. The second stanza also goes to Linden.

It's the fourth round before Cotter-Pin gets goin' good enough to do any damage. He splits the fourth fifty-fifty with his sweetheart's brother, and he takes the fifth and sixth in a whirlwind of clever boxin' and straight punchin'. When he has to fight, the kid is good. I notice that beginnin' with the fourth round he keeps sneakin' glances at Ike's gat, instead of over toward Liz.

It's the shootin' iron that makes him

fight. Also, in the seventh, it's the gun that loses the battle for him. He looks at Ike's flashin' artillery just a fraction of a second too long and too earnest. Linden steps in. *Zam!* He sends a beaut over that catches Cotter-Pin on the button and the lad's through.

Boy, what a Chicago count they give Cotter-Pin! But it's no use. Reluctantly the referee raises Jim Linden's hand, and bedlam breaks loose. Two mobs rush the ring. One, composed of Jim's friends, is anxious to carry their hero out on their shoulders. The other, led by Ike Paddleford, is just as eager to drag me and Cotter-Pin out by the necks.

I VAULT over the ropes to throw a bucket of water over Bill; and Jim Linden, who is already tryin' to wake him up, whispers in my ear:

"Stick close! Beat it outside with me—I know the back door. Cotter-Pin told me about Paddleford's threat. Gee, it was white of him to give me that chance to win!"

I don't argue with Jim at the time. He's givin' Cotter-Pin credit he don't deserve. But what of it? We're too busy tryin' to drag Bill out of the ring. The three of us make the back door, Jim and Bill still in their tights.

"Let's make a dash for the hotel," says Jim. "Sis will meet us there."

Three Charlie Paddocks, one of them too fat for satisfactory flight, sprint down Aurabelle's main stem for the Palace Hotel. We make it just ahead of Ike Paddleford and his friends. Liz is standin' in the doorway.

"Go on in," she directs, which is just what we are doin'. "I'm goin' to tell Ike and his gang something."

Jim and Cotter-Pin want to stay with her, but she shoos them up the

stairs after me. I turn around to see a frail little girl, arms a k i m b o, feet braced, stavin' off a mob of homicidal hoodlums—tellin' them where to get off. Boy, she sizzles! What a tongue-lashin' that girl can hand out! I kind of feel sorry for Cotter-Pin, if he ever marries her and she gets mad.

Apparently all the citizens of Auralbelle has gathered at the entrance to the hotel for an earful. Not wantin' too much undue publicity, Ike and his bunch slink off. Liz slams the door shut, locks it, grabs up a rifle from behind the desk and joins us at the head of the stairs. She comes into my room with Cotter-Pin and Jim. Her face is white, tense.

"Oh, I hate that beast, Paddleford!" she sobs, throwin' herself on the bed and startin' to cry. The reaction has set in. I shut the door and lock it. Cotter-Pin gets a glass of water and goes over to comfort her. Jim and me stand around, lookin' foolish.

"Ike 'll be back in the mornin'," says Jim to me. "I guess you and Cotter-Pin better leave town to-night."

It suits me, but Cotter-Pin says he won't leave unless Liz comes too; and Liz says she can't leave yet.

"You go," urges Cotter-Pin.

I ain't no hero. I would like to of departed then. On the other hand, I ain't yellow, and no slip of a girl nor dizzy glove-tosser is goin' to outstay me, anywhere.

After a while Jim Linden and his sister go home. Cotter-Pin and me hit the hay.

BEFORE breakfast Ike Paddleford and a delegation of his cronies arrives, all armed and menacin'-lookin'. They bang on the door with the imperious knock of the municipal police demandin' admission.

"Tried to put over a fast one, didn't you?" snarls Ike, grabbin' me by the shoulder and spinnin' me around. "Hangin's too good for your kind. What do you say, boys?" He turns to his pals. His opinion seems to be unanimous; which don't improve my appetite none.

"Listen," I says, beggin' for a chance to explain, "that fight was on the level. Cotter-Pin here's got a jinx. He never licked a ham fighter in his life."

"Yeah?" snaps Ike. "Prove it."

For once in my life I'm glad I saved newspaper clippin's of one of my boys' disgraces. Usually I only keep the wins to show around. I produce a bevy of notices sayin' what a bum Cotter-Pin is because some unknown palooka floored him in the third or the fifth round.

A look of bewilderment comes over Ike's pan. Suddenly he brightens up and steps to one side of the room to confer with his fellow conspirators. They have a little argument. Finally all of them nod in unison.

"O. K., boys?" says Ike.

"O. K.," says they, and Ike again addresses me.

"On account of the present sheriff bein' squeamish about lynchin's and *et cetera*," he snaps like a judge pronouncin' sentence, "we've decided to handle you a different way. Strictly legal."

It sounds encouragin', but glancin' at them dozen grim-faced guys toyin' with their six-guns, I ain't none too hopeful.

"Next Saturday," goes on Paddleford, "we'll have another fight. And Cotter-Pin's opponent will be—" He turns to the gang. "What was the fellow's name?"

"Slovensky," prompts a broad-

shouldered gent. Cotter-Pin winces at mention of the name.

"Yeah," says Ike. "That's it; Slovensky. We'll win our money back fair and square, though we was cheated out of it. Are you ready to sign the papers now and in the presence of these gentlemen, Mr. Webster?" He takes his gun from his holster and slams it down on the dresser alongside of his hand.

"I'm ready," I says weakly. "What share of the gate does the loser get?"

"Nothin'," snaps Paddleford. "And I hope you'll have enough money to pay for your room and board bill at the hotel and the trip in my private motor from Logan Point to Aurabelle."

"I hope so," I says, and I mean it.

After the committee of brigands has made it plain that any attempt to leave town before Saturday will be considered a serious breach of contract, they depart. Cotter-Pin turns to me:

"Slovensky's the guy that gave me the worst trimmin' I ever took."

"I know it," I says with a groan. "So does Ike Paddleford."

Later, when Liz and Jim Linden hear about this latest development, they try to cheer us up. Liz says maybe her influence rootin' for Cotter-Pin will break the jinx. Jim's got a more practical suggestion. He's been studyin' the account of the Slovensky brawl.

"This bird Slovensky is about my build, judgin' from the picture here," he remarks. "We've got a few days to get Cotter-Pin in shape. Let me be his sparrin' partner, and help you handle him in the ring."

"It's a bargain!" I agree, and we shake hands all around, even Liz givin' my mitt an extra little squeeze she's so sure everythin' is goin' to turn out all right, like it does in books.

Still, I ain't very sanguine. Slovensky arrives in town, proud, boastful. He's a roughneck, a dirty fighter. He ain't made much real progress since knockin' out Cotter-Pin, but he's sold on the notion Cotter-Pin is one guy he can lick any day in the week. Which gives him one of those psychological bulges over my ex-grease-monkey.

Cotter-Pin does some trainin' with Linden's help. Liz often watches the two boys box together in the blacksmith shop, and now and then she chips in with a hunk of advice that's pretty good for a girl.

SATURDAY night Ike Paddleford's old Pleasure Palace is jammed to the rafters. There has been rumors goin' around town, and everybody's anxious to see what's goin' to happen. The money's about even. To prove his faith in Cotter-Pin, Jim has had his friends pick up all the Slovensky cash that's offered. There's a surprisingly big pile of the do-re-mi up on both contenders, considerin' the fracas is nothin' better than a barnstormin' bout in a town that ain't even got a railroad.

Paddleford is sittin' down in front, of course. I warn Cotter-Pin to keep his eyes off him. Over in our corner Jim is with me. Liz is sittin' right behind us, her brown eyes ablaze with excitement and anticipation as Cotter-Pin climbs into the ring and limbers up on the ropes.

Slovensky starts the first round in a burst of sluggin'. He seems to show a lot of over-confidence. At that, he buries a heavy left hook to Cotter-Pin's stomach. He keeps rushin', tryin' to slug. Cotter-Pin steps back and meets him with some beautiful, clean counter-punches, but they don't damage the beefy Slovensky none. Sloven-

sky clinches. He elbows in at them, too. Cotter-Pin breaks away and drives a right to Slovensky's head. It jolts him, and Slovensky slams back a haymaker from the ground which Cotter-Pin side-steps. The round goes to Slovensky on his aggressiveness.

"Never mind, kid," I says to Cotter-Pin; "the fight's young yet."

In the second stanza Cotter-Pin gettin' anxious, tries Slovensky's stuff. He rushes out and hooks Slovensky with a left to the kisser that jars. Then he dances away from the heavier man's counter-attack, which is the best fight judgment I've seen him use in the fracas so far. Slovensky gets peeved and comes in like a mad bull terrier, aimin' his fiercest blows at Cotter-Pin's stomach. Cotter-Pin takes them, drives back a right to Slovensky's body and a left to the big bum's beak.

It was Liz that seen Slovensky wince when he took the smack in the bread hamper, and her mind operates with a flash of genius. When the round is over she gets my attention a second and whispers to me:

"Dan—notice how Slovensky makes his most vicious plays for Cotter-Pin's tummy?"

"Yeah, but he won't take a chance of losin' this fight on a foul," I point out. "They're all fair wallops."

"I know that," says she, lookin' at me like it's hard for a bright girl to understand how men can be so dumb. "But Slovensky didn't like the stomach blow Cotter-Pin gave him, one bit. I've got a hunch that Slovensky's tummy is his weak spot; and by the way he's playin' for Cotter-Pin's solar plexus, he thinks it's Bill's vulnerable point, too. Get Bill to go after Slovensky's bread basket."

I do, and in the next couple of rounds Cotter-Pin sure wears down

Slovensky's stamina and resistance by pepperin' his midriff with short rights and lefts. The steam is comin' out of Slovensky's haymakers. By the fifth round he's a tired hombre and showin' it. His fightin' has slowed down considerably, and his punches are wild and vicious, easily dodged by a foot-worker like Cotter-Pin.

The sixth semester winds up with the rounds even, the first three havin' gone to Slovensky and the rest to Cotter-Pin. Yet, barrin' accidents, it looks to be all one way from then on—Bill's fight. Bill's breathin' regular, perspirin' nicely and what I'd call just comfortably warmed up.

I SEE Ike Paddleford, lookin' sore and serious, lean over and say somethin' to Slovensky's manager. The guy nods, then speaks to his man. Whatever is up, I can tell Slovensky understands by the smiles that cross his pan. He steps into the seventh with new pep and the old rush. Cotter-Pin ducks a left hook and nails him with a right uppercut. Slovensky shoots a couple of mean ones that go under Cotter-Pin's arms, then he hooks a left and a right to Cotter-Pin's mouth that score. Cotter-Pin seems to have forgotten his admonition to go after Slovensky's stomach. He shoots a long left over to Slovensky's jaw, and misses.

Now Cotter-Pin's around the side of the ring where he can see Ike and the latter's six-gun.

"The bread box! The bread box!" I'm shoutin'.

He seems to snap out of it and gets ready for a stomach blow, which is what Slovensky wants, this time. The dirty tramp lets it come and deliberately jumps up into it, expectin' to claim a foul when he's smacked. I see the trick and am holdin' my breath.

Cotter-Pin's deliverin' the blow when his eyes are drawn by the fascination of Ike's gun, and as Cotter-Pin swings his shot in he misses a mile and goes sprawlin' onto the canvas. Boy, it was a lucky spill! If Slovensky hadn't been intent on jumpin' into the wallop for a foul, he would of had a swell chance to hang a haymaker on the kid.

Cotter-Pin gets up dazed. He ain't sure what's happened, and the crowd is givin' a chorus of Bronx cheers. Those that saw what Slovensky tried to pull are booin' him direct. The rest are raspberryin' Bill for the comedy flop. Bill's got brains enough to bicycle-ride till his head clears and the bell saves any more embarrassment.

"Keep your eyes off Ike!" I yell, while Jim's spongin' him off. "And no more stomach cracks, savvy? They're tryin' to pull a fake foul on us."

"Why don't we squawk about it?" asks Cotter-Pin.

"Be your age!" I snap, and shove him back into the ring.

The kid does what he's told, too. In the eighth and ninth he hammers Slovensky's head dizzy with rights and lefts, long shots and uppercuts. Slovensky starts fightin' dirty. He elbows in the clinches and puts over some mighty low borderline blows.

It's easily Cotter-Pin's fight; but I've got a hunch that if Slovensky ain't out as a fish at the end of the battle we're goin' to be robbed of the decision. Such things have happened in bigger and better towns than Auralbelle. I urge Cotter-Pin to play all he has on a knock-out in the tenth, and watch out for lucky fluke shots from Slovensky.

"Ain't I licked him yet?" inquires Bill.

He seems surprised and hurt when I tell him he ain't. Also mad. As a rule Cotter-Pin don't get mad in the ring, which is sometimes a help and sometimes the reverse. But he steps into the tenth plenty angry.

The tenth is a darb. Slovensky pushes Cotter-Pin's head back with his elbow. Cotter-Pin don't like it. He stalks Slovensky with straight lefts, shifts suddenly and lets him have a brace of beautiful rights to the jaw, one-two. Both rap the same spot. The second slaps Slovensky cold as he starts to fall.

Slovensky don't get up. He's listenin' to the music of yellow orioles. He don't hear the riot that ensues. He don't know Cotter-Pin's hand has been held high. He don't know Cotter-Pin has been announced the winnah. He don't know anythin'.

Back in the dressin' room, Liz and Jim and me hold hands and dance in a circle around the Cotter-Pin.

"Kid," I says, "you're great! We'll make a champ out of you yet. You licked a palooka. You ditched your jinx. You got faith in yourself now."

Cotter-Pin looks at me sadly. He asks us to calm down.

"No, Dan," he sighs. "I'm through. Bums like Slovensky always jinx me. I wanted to make some extra money for our honeymoon—Liz's and mine—so I bet all I had on the fight."

"Swell! You're sittin' pretty," I applaud.

"No I ain't," denies Cotter-Pin sadly. "Honest, Dan, them palookas always jinx me. I bet on Slovensky."

After all, a guy like that don't belong in the fight racket. Cotter-Pin's better off raisin' kids and runnin' the garage in Spokane, that was bought when Jim and Liz sold their mine.

THE END.



The priest's incantations rose loud and vibrant

Jungle Justice

Defending a man foredoomed to death, Gillian Hazeltine fights a weird legal battle in an oriental kingdom where devil-worship and the malicious fanaticism of an absolute despot baffle all his tricks

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "Murder! Murder!" "The Lost Punch," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

GILLIAN HAZELTINE, famous criminal lawyer, is in the Far East *en route* to meet his wife at Singapore, when he is kidnaped from his hotel in Saigon, French Indo-China, and taken to the jungle kingdom of Senang. The Sultan Chaddore Wang Chot Shoddor, an absolute monarch and a quite eccentric one, educated in England and America but utterly oriental at heart, has decided he would be amused to have Gillian Hazeltine defend young Richard Fowler.

Fowler, drugged, had killed Ezra Meeker, believing that Meeker had

stolen his soul. For the residents of Senang are devil-worshippers, steeped in the lore of the *nat* priests who claim to transfer souls from one body to another; and both Fowler and Meeker had become saturated in oriental beliefs. The Sultan is to be judge; his right-hand man, the Eurasian Chong, is to be prosecutor; the chief witness, Captain Yanglat, of his bodyguard.

But Prince Kouang Chot Lenchow, high priest of the *nat*-worshippers, gets Gillian aside, and suggests that his brother the Sultan is playing another and deeper game, including the theft of

This story began in the *Argosy* for October 11.

Gillian's own soul. He informs Gillian that he, Prince Kouang, will guarantee the release of Gillian, Fowler, his fiancée, Janet Thorne, and her father—if, when Gillian needs help during the trial, he will call upon Prince Kouang. Puzzled, Gillian agrees.

CHAPTER XI.

DEVIL-WORSHIP ON TRIAL.

THE case of the Sultanate of Senang *versus* Richard Fowler, murderer, was doubtless the strangest case in which Gillian Hazeltine had ever taken part. Certainly, as counsel for the defence, he had never entered a court room with less preparation and less hope of freeing a client.

The strange bargain he had struck with Prince Kouang Chot Lenchow on the hilltop above the Valley of the Dead the night before, had become, in Gillian's mind, a fantasy. It was hard for him to believe that that conversation had taken place.

But the tall priest of the *nat* worshippers was in attendance, as he had promised—or threatened—to be. So, also, were the Thornes, father and daughter, and Captain Yanglat, of the Sultan's bodyguard.

The trial took place in an anteroom in the old wing of the palace; a room that was bizarre and, to Gillian, very depressing. The walls and ceiling were of panelled ebony. At one end of the room stood a dais of ebony inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl. Before this were two long ebony tables, for opposing counsel. A half dozen teakwood benches without backs had been brought in for spectators. But there were, aside from those mentioned, no spectators.

The center of the ceiling was shut-

tered. By means of cords, running down to knobs on the inner wall, these shutters, of a lattice-like construction, could be drawn back, so that that part of the ceiling became nothing but blue sky.

The room had at one time been used as a gymnasium. The great-great-great-grandfather of the present Sultan had had the shutters installed in keeping with original ideas in ventilation.

The Sultan made his entrance in formal court attire—white turban, upon the front folds of which gleamed an ox-blood ruby—an evil omen, as far as Gillian was concerned; white robe and sandals.

He was the last to enter the room. The prisoner, handcuffed, was seated at the counsel table with Gillian.

Every one arose. When the Sultan had ascended the dais, Mr. Chester Chong, with a puzzled look about his eyes, said:

"Your majesty, we are prepared to proceed with this trial. Will you instruct us?"

Sultan Chaddore Wang Chot Shodor revealed his blackened teeth in a faint smile.

"In deference to our guest counsel, court room procedure will be patterned after the American system, except that there will be, of course, no jury. I will act as magistrate. During this trial, gentlemen, I am to be addressed as 'Your honor,' not as 'Your majesty.' Witnesses will not be sworn. I may add, Mr. Hazeltine, that the penalty for perjury in Senang is five hundred strokes of the bastinado; that is to say, five hundred lashes with a bamboo whip on the soles of the feet. Let us proceed."

The Sultan looked about the room. His eyes flicked over Gillian and the

murderer, on to Mr. Chester Chong, on to Professor Thorne and his daughter, and they stopped at the strange vermillion face, the blued eye-sockets of Prince Kouang. The Sultan's eyes narrowed. He drew a deep breath. Then he cleared his throat and said:

"Is the State ready?"

"I am ready, your honor," said Mr. Chong.

"Is the defence ready?"

"It is ready, your honor," Gillian said. Ready? There was, on the long black table before him, not the scrap of a note, not an atom of material evidence.

"You will read the charge, Mr. Chong."

CHESTER CHONG picked up a typed sheet of paper from his table and, in his smooth, oily voice, began:

"To the court of His Royal Highness the Sultan Chaddore Wang Chot Shoddor, King of Senang, comes Chester Chong, attorney for the Sultanate of Senang, and on his oath of office complaint and information makes that on the fourth day of Sadraheit, Richard Fowler, a naturalized Senangese citizen, of the town of Senang, did wilfully and deliberately and in full possession of his faculties shoot down one Ezra Meeker, a naturalized Senangese citizen, so that the said Ezra Meeker did languish and suffer and did, within the lapse of minutes, die, so that the said Richard Fowler did then and there commit the crime of murder in the first degree against the peace of the people of Senang and the dignity of His Royal Highness the Sultan Chaddore Wang Chot Shoddor, King of Senang, and contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided."

Mr. Chong laid the paper down and looked at Gillian. The Sultan said:

"How does the defence plead?"

"Not guilty, your honor," Gillian said.

"The State will proceed."

The Sultan sank back on the dais. Prince Kouang bent forward, dropped one elbow to one knee and placed his chin upon his fist. He gazed steadily at the face of his brother.

Janet Thorne was holding her father's hand. With her free hand, she held a small blue handkerchief to her mouth. Above it, her eyes were large and miserable.

"I will endeavor to prove to this court," Mr. Chong was saying in his unctuous voice, "all of the facts set forth in the charge which I have just read."

He paused. He looked at Gillian. And Gillian observed that Mr. Chong's eyes were not like spots of fog now but were blue and brilliant, and he wondered how many pipes of opium "tonic" Mr. Chong had smoked to prepare himself for this battle of wits.

"It is the custom in American courts," went on the oriental lawyer, "to prove, at the outset of a homicide trial, the existence of a *corpus delicti*. With permission from the counsel for the defence, we will omit the giving of that testimony. No coroner or medical examiner was on hand to examine the body of Ezra Meeker. Because of the intense heat of our jungles, it is necessary, when a man dies, to bury him quickly. This was done in the case of Ezra Meeker's remains. Witnesses will later be produced, if defence counsel wishes, to prove that Ezra Meeker was dead when buried. Is that satisfactory, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"Quite satisfactory, Mr. Chong," Gillian said.

"I will now prove, to support the charge as read," Mr. Chong went on, "that both Richard Fowler and Ezra Meeker took out Senangese naturalization papers. If they were not citizens of Senang and subjects of the Sultan, certain troubling legal questions would arise. My first witness will be Jola Seremban. The guard will call Jola Seremban!"

THE massive teak doors, which were the only entrance to the ebony room, were unbarred by Captain Yanglat. After a moment, a thin young Senangese, in European garb, entered with a great black book under his arm. He looked frightened. His little black eyes darted about the room. Unsteadily he walked to a chair facing the dais, and seated himself there.

In answer to Mr. Chong's questions, he stated that he was the head clerk in the office of the Senangese Customs Department. He spoke broken English, with lapses into the pidgin English of the coast cities.

"What is that book?"

"It is a record, sair, of those who come from the out world and become ceet'zens of Senang, sair."

"Have you in that book a record of the naturalization of one Ezra Meeker and one Richard Fowler?"

"I have, sair."

"What was their previous nationality?"

"Both *birahis* were Americains, sair."

"On what date did they become Senangese citizens?"

Jola Seremban looked confused. He stuttered, "N-no can do, sair." Then he began to speak in the native tongue. When he stopped, Mr. Chong smiled dimly.

"What he said, Mr. Hazeltine, is in substance that the dates of our calendar would mean nothing to you. According to our reckoning, this year which on your calendar is 1930 is, in Senang, the year 4214. Transposing these dates, Ezra Meeker became a citizen of Senang on December 10th, 1924; Richard Fowler was admitted to citizenship on April 18th, 1927. Do you wish to cross-examine this witness?"

"No," said Gillian. "Jola Seremban is excused; but I should like to ask the court some questions. Why, your honor, was it necessary for Meeker and the accused to become Senangese citizens?"

"The rule was put into effect by my grandfather, Sultan Chaddore Ying Wanlat, when the first white men penetrated this country. My grandfather was a far-seeing man. He wished to treat these white men fairly, but he did not wish them to take advantage of him. By compelling white men and other aliens to become citizens of Senang, he thereby obtained legal authority over them."

"Was his right to that rule ever questioned and put to a legal test?" Gillian said.

"It was, Mr. Hazeltine. An Englishman named Broderick stole a large diamond from the forehead of a god in a jungle temple in Baolo. He escaped with it to Saigon. He was arrested and extradited. His trial took place in this very room. He was sentenced to five years of hard labor, but he died before the sentence was completed. You will find this case duly recorded in the files of the foreign relations department in Saigon. Are you now completely satisfied on this point?"

"Yes, your honor"

"Call your next witness, Mr. Chong."

Janet Thorne had withdrawn her handkerchief from her mouth. She was looking at Gillian with an air of hope. There was something so substantial, so reassuring about him; something strong and powerful. Certainly he would do everything in his power for Richard.

"My next witness," Mr. Chong said, "is Professor Thorne."

HARRISON THORNE looked surprised, but he took the stand.

Replying to Mr. Chong's perfunctory questions, he said that he was a naturalized citizen of Senang, that he was exploring the jungles of Cambodia for ancient temples and lost cities for the Smithsonian Institution.

"Did you know Ezra Meeker?"

"I did."

"Kindly tell this court what you can about Ezra Meeker."

"I knew very little about the man. Frankly, I did not like him. My opinion is that he was a thief and a rascal generally. He came to Senang, as far as I know, without credentials of any kind. He seemed to know a great deal about the East; he had a smattering of the sciences. My first opinion was that he was a discredited scientist. This I revised later. I believe that he was nothing but a beach comber. He was the only white man I ever knew who ate opium. He did not smoke it; he ate it.

"He told me that he was tremendously interested in devil-worship; that he had studied, in various parts of the East, the peoples who worshiped *nats*. He said he had come overland, across Siam, from upper Burma. I believe he lived in Taung Byone with a native wife for several years. In upper Siam,

he stayed with the Moosars—a *nat*-worshipping tribe. He was a firm believer in *nats*.

"My real dislike for Meeker began when he started paying attentions to my daughter. She disliked him as much as I did, and she distrusted him. She was certain that he was stealing opium from the stores I always carry for my coolies. Meeker became very obnoxious one night. He made advances to my daughter and proposed that they run away together and get married. At that time, she was engaged to marry Richard Fowler, the accused.

"Meeker was extremely jealous of Richard Fowler. I once overheard him offering Richard a large sum of money if Richard would consent to the performance of a *nat* ceremony by which they would exchange personalities or souls. All I know about that discussion is that Richard flatly refused.

"I can tell you little more about Meeker. He was a man of about forty, with fanatical black eyes and a startling shock of blue-black hair. My clearest recollection of him is his fingernails: they were always dirty."

The professor stopped. Mr. Chong said:

"Was there ever any ill feeling on the accused's part because of Meeker's attentions to your daughter?"

"No, not that I recall. We all disliked Meeker."

"Were you present at the ceremony when Meeker and the accused exchanged personalities or souls?"

"No. It took place, I believe, in the Yudda Hills, where the accused was making surveys for a bridge. I was then in Baoli. I had gone on to Baoli with my entourage. Meeker and Richard stayed behind."

"That will be all. Do you wish to take this witness, Mr. Hazeltine?"

GILLIAN arose and plunged his fists into his pants pockets.

"I should like a ruling, your honor, on a point that will doubtless grow more important as this trial progresses. I presume that the Mosaic law prevails in Senang, as it does in all countries. Is that assumption correct?"

"It is, Mr. Hazeltine, so far as the dispensing of justice from this bench is concerned."

"What, then, is the court's ruling in the case of a murder arising over the stealing or the acquiring by force of another man's soul or personality? In the opinion of the court, is such an act sufficient justification for murder?"

"The question you bring up," the Sultan said, "has never before arisen, so far as I know, in the history of my sultanate. My ruling is that murder would not be justified in such a case."

"Very well, your honor. Now, professor. Do you believe in *nats*?"

"If you mean, am I a devil-worshiper, I am not, Mr. Hazeltine."

"I do not mean, are you a devil-worshiper. I mean, do you believe in *nats*?"

The professor looked uncomfortable. "I must answer that question by saying that I have not formed an opinion."

Gillian looked at him dreamily. "Professor Thorne, you are a scientist. It would be logical and rational to assume that you have the most scientific mind in this court room. You have observed *nat* ceremonies and rituals. Do you believe that, by means of any ceremony or ritual, it is possible for two men to exchange personalities or souls?"

"I cannot answer that question."

"Let me put it this way. You knew Ezra Meeker fairly well. You knew the accused fairly well. You were acquainted with the personality of each man. You knew the accused before the ceremony in which the two men's souls are alleged to have been exchanged, and you have known him since that ceremony. Would you say that his personality has changed since the ceremony?"

"I would indeed, Mr. Hazeltine!"

"Would you go so far as to say that he has, since the ceremony, manifested any of the characteristics of Ezra Meeker?"

"I would go farther than that, Mr. Hazeltine. I would say emphatically that the accused has acquired *all* of the characteristics of Ezra Meeker. Before that ceremony, Richard was a gay, amusing, delightful young man, always full of jokes for everybody, always bantering. Since that ceremony, he has been sullen, ill-tempered, inaccessible, mean—exactly like Ezra Meeker. Before that ceremony I know that he never touched opium. Since, I know that he has *eaten opium*."

"How much of such a change in character do you think might have been due to the fact that a man had killed another? Don't you think that that realization would have affected any man's personality?"

"It would have had some effect, perhaps," Professor Thorne agreed, "but it would not account for such a sweeping change."

"Yet you say, professor, that, in spite of this drastic change in his personality, you do not believe that it is possible for a *nat* priest by means of some ceremony to exorcise the soul of one man out of his body and inject it into another?"

"I repeat that I am not certain."

Gillian seemed to be absorbed in Professor Thorne's luxuriant beard.

"Did Ezra Meeker ever make any efforts of a physical nature to compel your daughter's love?"

"I would prefer not to answer that question. My daughter will speak for herself."

"Thank you, professor. That will be all. Your next witness, Mr. Chong?"

"Miss Janet Thorne."

CHAPTER XII.

PUPPETS.

JANET THORNE went to the stand. She was pale. She clasped and unclasped her hands in her lap and looked beseechingly at Gillian.

Mr. Chong said crisply: "Miss Thorne, isn't it true that the accused was jealous of Ezra Meeker?"

"No!"

"Isn't it true that there was sufficient provocation for him to be jealous of Ezra Meeker?"

"There was not. I did not like Ezra Meeker. I detested him. So did everybody. Richard knew I disliked Meeker. Why should he have been jealous?"

Mr. Chong smiled thinly. "But isn't it true, Miss Thorne, that on at least one occasion, you were compelled to use physical force to resist Ezra Meeker's attentions?"

"Perhaps it is true."

"And didn't you tell the accused?"

"Perhaps I did."

"And wasn't he furious?"

"He was, as any decent man would have been, Mr. Chong. He went to Ezra Meeker and told him he must stop."

"Was there a quarrel?"

"There was, naturally."

"And didn't the accused make

threats that if Meeker annoyed you again, he would 'get his'?"

"There may have been some such conversation."

"I object to this line of questioning, your honor," Gillian interrupted. "My esteemed colleague is obviously endeavoring to establish a jealousy motive for the murder of Meeker. I insist that the point he is trying to prove is beside the issue."

"Your objection is overruled, Mr. Hazeltine."

Mr. Chong smiled. "That's all."

Gillian walked toward her. "Miss Thorne, was it ever necessary for you to use force in repulsing Ezra Meeker's attentions?"

"It was," the girl said. "One night he tried to kiss me. He wanted me to run away with him. I told him not to be absurd. He took me in his arms and when he tried to kiss me, I pushed him away. It made him so furious that he struck me. His rattan stick was on the table. I picked it up and lashed him across the face with it."

"And you told the accused about that incident?"

"I did. I was afraid of Meeker. I was present when Richard told Meeker that if he bothered me again, he would thrash him."

"He did not threaten to kill him?"

"Of course not!"

"Miss Thorne, do you believe in *nats*?"

The girl miserably shook her head. "I don't know."

"You mean, you can't make up your mind?"

I DON'T know whether to believe in it or not," she said uncomfortably. "I have seen so many weird things in these jungles. Once, in a little village near Baoli, I saw one of

those terrible ceremonies. An old man was dying. No one knew what was the matter with him, but they said his soul was sick, and that he simply didn't want to live any longer. Yet he was such a wise, good man that the villagers wanted him to go on living. They arranged one of these ceremonies. A very healthy young man was chosen for the ceremony. He was a man in whom the will or the wish to live was very strong.

"The *nat* priests performed the ceremony, smoking out the souls of the two men and making them drink that green stuff. When the two men recovered consciousness, I—I didn't know what to think. It seemed so preposterous. But this is what happened: That old man seemed young again. His eyes *looked* young. He was animated. All of that old lassitude was gone.

"But the young man was listless. His eyes were dull. He simply sat and stared at the ground. It was as if the will to live had left his body. I heard that he died a few weeks later.

"I saw that, Mr. Hazeltine; not his death, but all the rest. Even seeing it with my own eyes, I refused to believe that such a thing was possible. And I still hesitate to believe."

"Miss Thorne," Gillian said, "will you corroborate what your father has just said about the change in the accused's nature?"

"I certainly will! And it was not the change that would take place in a man because he had killed another. It was a definite character change. Richard was always so happy, so amusing, so—"

She stopped. Her eyes were shining with tears. "He *is* Meeker!" she cried. "He isn't Richard any more!"

"Then," said Gillian tensely, "you must believe that his soul was lost in

that ceremony, and that he acquired the soul of Meeker!"

She was digging her nails into her palms. Bright spots had appeared on her cheekbones.

"I do! I do!" she wailed.

"This witness is excused," Gillian said.

The Sultan was staring at him with narrowed, glinting little eyes. His black teeth were bared in a curious grimace. Then he spoke:

"Your next witness, Mr. Chong."

"Captain Yanglat."

"May I ask the court," Gillian said, "why no record is being taken of these proceedings?"

"So that you might demand a retrial on technical grounds?" the Sultan answered.

"I might wish to study this testimony," Gillian said.

"Mr. Hazeltine, if you are handicapped by your inability to practice your famous tricks, that is unfortunate, is it not? But perhaps for the first time since you have practiced law, justice and not trickery may prevail."

Gillian reddened, but he did not retaliate. This was not a trial. The Sultan of Senang was merely amusing himself. Witnesses, lawyers, the accused were marionettes jerked by strings in the hands of this, the last absolute monarch in the world.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE THEFT OF A SOUL.

CAPTAIN YANGLAT sat erectly in the witness chair. He answered questions crisply, directly. Yes; he had been present when the accused and Ezra Meeker had exchanged words—hot words—over Miss Janet Thorne. He had been present

when the soul-changing ceremony was performed by the Yudda priests. He had been present when the accused had shot and instantly killed Ezra Meeker.

"Kindly describe the circumstances of that quarrel, captain," Mr. Chong requested.

"The accused was engaged in surveying a route for a road into the Yudda country," the captain stated. "Ezra Meeker had been a guest of Professor Thorne. When the professor and his entourage moved on to Baoli, Ezra Meeker joined the accused's camp. Neither man made any pretense of liking the other. They hated each other. I gathered that Meeker was in love with the Thorne girl. He was determined to win her by any means. At least, he said so. I was amused. To me, it was the oldest story in the world: two men in love with the same girl.

"I heard Meeker one day offer the accused any sum of money he would name if he would voluntarily exchange souls with him. The accused asked him where that money was. Meeker said that he knew positively where one of Genghis Khan's treasures was buried. He said that the treasure—one of the greatest treasures on earth—was accessible; that a small armed band could go into the country where it was hidden in a cave, and could make off with the entire treasure. He offered to go halves with this treasure, if the accused would consent to this exchange of souls."

"What did the accused say to that, captain?"

"He laughed in Meeker's face."

"And then?"

"I believe that Meeker bribed the *nat* priests to perform the ceremony without the accused's consent. I was present when it was performed. When

the accused recovered consciousness, he realized immediately that he had been tricked. He went to his tent, secured his automatic pistol and emptied it into Meeker. I then took charge of the situation. I saw that Meeker was buried and I arrested the accused and brought him here under guard." Captain Yanglat stopped.

Gillian whispered to Richard Fowler, "Is that story true?"

"Yes," the young man said grimly.

Mr. Chong said: "Do you wish to take this witness, Mr. Hazeltine?"

Said Gillian: "Thank you, I do. Captain, are you a believer in *nats*, and in *nat*-worship?"

"Yes, sir; it is my religion."

"Do you believe that it is possible, with a ceremony, to drive the soul out of one man into the body of another?"

"I do. I have seen it happen often."

"Will you tell me what change you saw in Ezra Meeker's character or personality after that ceremony, in the few minutes which elapsed before he was shot and killed by the accused?"

"He was a different man, Mr. Hazeltine. When he recovered consciousness, he was smiling. I don't believe I had ever seen him smile before. His eyes were different. They were no longer sullen and dark. There was a light in them. His face looked different. He looked happy."

"And there was a corresponding change in the accused?"

"There was, sir. Even in his quarrels with Meeker, there had been an air of cheerfulness about him."

"You are excused, captain."

"MY next witness is the accused," said Mr. Chong.

"Your honor," Gillian cried, "I strenuously object. The accused is my witness. According to American

procedure, an accused man can not be called upon to testify against his wishes. I do not wish my client to testify until the proper time."

"We will depart," said the Sultan suavely, "from the American procedure. The accused will take the stand."

Richard Fowler took the stand. His sullen eyes darted about the room. They glared at the Sultan. They glared at Mr. Chong. His rumpled tawny hair gave him a belligerent look.

Mr. Chong: "Mr. Fowler, is it true that you resented the attentions Ezra Meeker was paying to Miss Thorne?"

"Yes!"

"Is it true that you threatened to thrash him if he did not desist?"

"Yes!"

"Is it true that he offered to lead you to the treasure of Genghis Khan if you would consent to exchange souls with him?"

"Yes!"

"Did he tell you where this treasure is?"

"No!"

"Is it true that, immediately upon recovering consciousness after the soul-exchanging ceremony, the *bandarlei*, you went to your tent, secured your pistol and shot and instantly killed him?"

"Yes," the young man said savagely. "I killed him. I'd kill him again!"

Mr. Chong smiled thinly.

"That will be all. I have no more witnesses to offer, your honor."

Gillian glanced at Prince Kouang, who still sat as he had been sitting since the trial began, with his vermilion-covered face resting on his hand, his elbow resting on his knee. The head *nat* priest returned his glance without recognition, without seeming intelligence.

Gillian faced the prisoner.

"Richard, do you believe in *nats*?"

"I do."

"You believe, do you, that these spirits or devils inhabit the trees, the flowers, the animals, the insects, the very air?"

"I do."

"And you believe, of course, that the priests of this religion have the power to transfer the soul of one man into the body of another?"

"I do!"

"I wish you would tell me in your own words just what your sensations were during and after this ceremony in the Yudda hills when the priests exorcized your soul from your body, and Ezra Meeker's soul from Ezra Meeker's body, and placed each soul in the other man."

"I CANNOT describe the sensations clearly," the prisoner said. "I was drugged. I understand that one drop of this drug is sufficient to make a man practically unconscious during the 'smoking' process. I was not entirely unconscious. It was as if—as if my soul was floating off somewhere, on a sort of sea, or a cloud. I was not even conscious of the smoke. I wasn't conscious of any physical sensation. I was bound to the earth. My soul was floating off somewhere. From a long way away, I could see my body surrounded by smoke. I was trying to come back to it. I was trying—"

Richard Fowler stopped. Beads of sweat stood out on his young forehead. His eyes were bulging. His mouth was twisted in a sort of snarl. He was gripping the arms of the chair.

"I tried to come back to my body. Do you see what I mean? I was away off up there, looking down, and afraid. I wanted to come back. When I say 'I,' I mean my soul, my spirit, whatever it is—or was, because it is not here

any longer. My soul wanted to come back to me. It tried. But it could not come back. It never came back. Another soul came back.

"I felt terribly sick when this happened. I felt as sick as you feel when some one strikes you a terrific blow in the solar plexus. I thought I was dying. Everything was gray and horrible."

"It must," Gillian said, "have been like a horrible dream."

"It was worse than the most horrible dream. And then, suddenly, my head became clear. I was sitting up. There was a smell of smoke in the air. I took a deep breath, and I knew that I was not the man I had been when that smoke began. I was so angry about something that my hands shook with it. I bit my lip until it bled. My eyes felt queer.

"And there was this queer gnawing, partly in my head and partly in my stomach. It was a craving. Somehow, I knew that I wanted opium. I did not use opium before. Once, in Hongkong, I smoked it with some other fellows, just to see what it was like. It made my head terribly clear. It made every thought that came into it seem brilliant. Next day I was as sick as a dog. But at the time I had the most brilliant thought of them all when I realized that opium is dangerous stuff.

"After that ceremony, all this came back. I knew that I wanted that sensation of clearness in my head. I knew that opium would bring it. I was grinding my teeth together. I suddenly hated the world, everybody. I wanted to strike somebody.

"Then I looked over to the other bamboo rack where Ezra Meeker was sitting. He was smiling. His eyes were sparkling. And then I knew. I knew that the light behind his eyes was

my light. I knew that he had tricked me and somehow bribed those priests to perform that ceremony without my knowledge.

"It was like looking into a distorted mirror. He was smiling *my* smile at *me*. And I realized that while my soul or my spirit was away off out there, it had come back, not to me, but to him; that they had driven it out of me and into him. And I realized what my life would be like if I had to live it with his ugliness in my body.

"I went over to him and told him that if he did not immediately have this ceremony performed again, returning me my soul, I would kill him. He only laughed at me—laughed *my* laugh. Then I went into my tent and found my pistol and came back and put nine bullets into him."

THE Sultan leaned forward: "And you are not sorry that you murdered this man?"

"I am not sorry. He was a *gekko* who deserved what he got!"

"I see," said the Sultan, and he stroked his untidy little black mustache.

Said Gillian: "Richard, have you at any time suspected that your soul was not Meeker's soul?"

"The soul I now have?"

"Yes."

"It is Meeker's. I am like Meeker. I am growing more and more like Meeker. I *am* Meeker!"

"Your honor," said Gillian, "I should like your opinion on this difficult matter. The testimony of reliable witnesses has convinced me beyond any reasonable doubt that the ceremony performed by the Yudda *nat* priests did transfer Richard Fowler's soul to Ezra Meeker, and Ezra Meeker's soul to Richard Fowler. I now wish to know whether you are a believer in *nats*."

"For the purpose of argument?"

"No, your honor; for purposes of justice. I am following a deliberate line. Are you yourself a *nat*-worshiper?"

"I am, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Then you firmly believe that it is possible for two men, during this strange *nat* ceremony, to exchange souls or spirits or personalities?"

"I do, Mr. Hazeltine."

Gillian smiled nervously.

"Then, your honor, it seems to me that we have arrived at the crux of this matter. If the accused, in the course of that ceremony, acquired Ezra Meeker's soul and Ezra Meeker acquired the accused's soul, the charge against this young man is false, and I respectfully petition that it be dismissed and the young man given his freedom instantly. Richard Fowler did not murder Ezra Meeker. Ezra Meeker murdered Richard Fowler!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SULTAN'S TRAP.

THE Sultan revealed his blackened teeth in an amused grin. He leaned forward and looked with sparkling little dark eyes at Gillian.

"Mr. Hazeltine, I compliment you. By a process of clever reasoning, you have arrived at precisely the conclusion that I knew you would. If Richard Fowler, the accused, did not murder Ezra Meeker, then Ezra Meeker murdered Richard Fowler. This young man then becomes Ezra Meeker. He admits that he is Ezra Meeker. He admits that he killed a man possessed of the soul of Richard Fowler. Very well. The names in the charge will merely be reversed. You are now at liberty to prove, if you can, that the

accused did not murder Richard Fowler."

Said Gillian grimly: "Your honor, may I ask you further questions concerning *nat* worship and ceremonies?"

"I will be delighted to answer your questions, Mr. Hazeltine."

"We have all agreed," Gillian said, "that the soul of this young man who stands accused of a murder was injected into the body of a man who now lies dead and buried in the Yudda hills. When that man died, where did his soul go?"

"To the *nat* hell-heaven."

"Is it possible, by any *nat* ceremony, to resurrect that soul from the *nat* hell-heaven and return it to this young man's body?"

"It is."

"Is it possible to drive the soul now inhabiting his body out of his body and to the *nat* hell-heaven?"

"It is."

Gillian turned with a wry smile to Prince Kouang Chot Lenchow, who sat with vermilion face on fist, and elbow on knee. The priest looked at Gillian with half-lidded eyes. A message of understanding passed between them. What Prince Kouang had said to Gillian on the hilltop last night had suddenly acquired meaning. The time had come! To the Sultan Gillian said:

"Your honor, you told me yesterday that Prince Kouang is the head *nat* priest of Senang. I wish him to conduct an experiment. I wish him to drive the soul of the murderer, Ezra Meeker, out of this young man's body and return to it the soul of Richard Fowler."

The Sultan stared at him.

"Do you think that that will alter his standing in this court room? He will still be the man who killed Ezra Meeker. Mr. Hazeltine, you can do nothing. I have proved what I wished

to prove. Removed from the legal machinery with which you are familiar, you cannot function. There is no way in which you or any man can free this man. You mentioned the Mosaic law. A life for a life! This man took a life with deliberation. In any land in the world, that is a crime punishable by death. This man is to die by Ling-Chi as I decreed. Professor Thorne and his daughter shall be held on charges of perjury. You I shall hold for contempt of court!"

THE excited throbbing in Gillian's left temple became suddenly painful. He was absolutely at the mercy, he realized, not of this fanatical Sultan, but of Prince Kouang.

Prince Kouang had said that a time would come— The time had come. Prince Kouang had said that the Sultan's real purpose in bringing Gillian to Senang had been to induct the lawyer into one of these weird and terrible ceremonies in which men exchanged souls.

Controlling himself, Gillian said: "Your honor, you have not yet ruled on my petition. I requested that Prince Kouang be permitted to perform the *nat* ceremony whereby Richard Fowler's soul will be once more restored to him."

Prince Kouang Chot Lenchow arose. While Gillian pressed one hand to his left temple and held his breath, the head *nat* priest slowly strode toward the dais. He uttered a brief sentence in Senangese. The Sultan looked at him in alarm. Prince Kouang spoke again, at greater length. Captain Yanglat jumped up and ran to the door. He shouted some order. Half-naked Tonkinese servants came running in, a moment later, with red lacquer trays, containing betel, fresh pan vine leaves,

pellets of shell lime and chunam, cardamom, turmeric and other aromatics.

The Sultan descended from the dais. The two brothers squatted, facing each other across the trays, for a royal conference.

Gillian anxiously returned to his seat beside Richard Fowler.

"Do you know what they are saying?"

The young man dully nodded. "The Sultan is opposed to it, but Kouang will have his way. It is no longer a question for the Sultan to decide. Kouang must decide it."

"Then it goes back to the Sultan?"

"Yes, sir. And what chance does it give me? He has decided that I am going to die. Why he brought you here, Mr. Hazeltine, God only knows. He wants Janet; we all know that. He will get rid of her father. He will get rid of me. But he could have done all that without bringing you here. I do not understand why he brought you here. Unless—"

Gillian looked at him. "Unless?" he prompted.

The young man shrugged. "So you are the next victim of *bandar-lei*!"

The Sultan had risen. A trickle of the blood-red juice of the betel ran down from one corner of his opened mouth.

In an agitated voice he said: "My brother has agreed that it is necessary to conduct this ceremony. It will be done in this court room." He returned to the dais, and Prince Kouang in his harsh voice began to issue orders.

Captain Yanglat said: "No one will be permitted to leave this court room."

"Mr. Hazeltine," Richard Fowler said, "I know these people. I don't know how to tell you how to get out of this. Kouang is up to something. He is bad pidgin. But all I know defi-

nately is that he and the Sultan hate each other like strange snakes."

THE heavy teak doors of the ebony room opened to admit a swarm of native servants. Two queer-looking bamboo structures were brought in. They looked like crude cots. Richard Fowler explained to Gillian that they were the racks upon which the subjects of this weird *nat* ceremony were to lie.

Gillian said promptly: "Who is the other victim?" His heart began to thump. He said, with a mirthless laugh: "I don't want *my* soul smoked out of me!"

Servants were piling up fagots on the brick floor. Captain Yanglat went to the cords which regulated the shutters in the ceiling, and threw them open.

The Sultan and Prince Kouang were talking in Senangese. Their voices rose and fell, rose still higher. Prince Kouang suddenly fell silent, and the Sultan babbled on and on, his voice rising in a wail to a thin screech.

Richard Fowler suddenly emitted a bark-like laugh. He clutched Gillian's arm. Janet Thorne had left her seat and had come over to huddle beside her *fiancé*.

"Something is going on here," Fowler said excitedly. "The Sultan has accused Kouang of doping him with that betel. He said the cardamom tasted like aloes. I think we are going to see some fun. I think we are all going to be killed before it is over, but first we are going to see some fun."

Janet Thorne said tremulously: "Darling, what is it?"

And the doomed man said: "Kouang and Chaddore are having it out at last. They've hated each other from birth. Ah, yes, the fun will now begin. Janet—"

He did not finish. The girl was in his arms. It occurred to Gillian that the lovers were kissing each other good-bye as if they never expected to see each other again. The throbbing in his left temple was by this time almost unbearable.

Prince Kouang was mixing something in a golden cup. He came striding over to Richard and said clearly, in English: "Drink this, and do it quickly."

Gillian watched him drink it. The young man put the golden cup down and sat rigidly upright, as a man might sit in the dark, expecting a blow to fall from any direction.

Then Gillian saw the Sultan coming toward him. His face was distorted. His eyes were bulging. His mouth was working convulsively upon his blackened lips.

The Sultan staggered. He lifted both hands convulsively to his mouth and fell headlong in a faint at Gillian's feet.

Prince Kouang picked him up; carried him over and laid him upon one of the bamboo racks. He returned to the table, grasped Richard Fowler by the elbow and led him to the other rack.

Then he turned to Mr. Chong and pointed expressively at the door. Mr. Chong, his eyes glittering, his face saffron, ran to the door. Captain Yanglat bolted it after him.

Professor Thorne had dropped his face into his hands. When Gillian approached him, the scientist said despairingly:

"I can't stand this. I've seen this thing twice before. I can't stand it. Mr. Hazeltine, how are we going to escape from here?"

And Gillian answered: "If Prince Kouang betrays an agreement I made

with him last night, I am afraid we will never escape."

THE *nat* priest had started small fires under the racks supporting the two unconscious men. Gray fumes of smoke began curling up about the bamboo latticework. The two men were groaning.

Prince Kouang added fuel to the little fires, and Gillian, terrified and fascinated, watched the smoke curl up from them, surround the men and climb upward through the aperture in the ceiling. Here was the orient that he had dreamed of as a boy—oriental witchcraft, oriental Sultans, in the heart of the oriental jungle.

He was aware, but only vaguely, that Janet was clasping his hand and uttering low moans. A curious odor stole to him. It was like the smell of opium, yet it was more highly spiced.

The smoke grew thicker. It changed color, or perhaps Gillian only imagined that. To him, it seemed that the color changed from gray to pale blue, to violet and to a dense inky purple. Certainly, that smoke became denser.

Prince Kouang, standing, a fantastic figure in his red turban and red robe, melted and became lost in the rising purple clouds. He was chanting, and Gillian, listening to it, felt colder and sicker still. The voice of the priest was deep and vibrant; he chanted in sharp periods, and it seemed to Gillian that through the purple smoke came the muffled distant beating of temple drums, the shrill savage music of the *ya-gwin* and the *patma*.

Gillian was carried away by the spell of it as he had not been carried away by the dance of the Shan girls last night in the Valley of the Dead. A dragon with fire spurting from its nostrils might have emerged from that pil-

lar of smoke and Gillian would not have been astonished.

The groaning of the two men stopped. And as suddenly as if it had been severed with a knife the smoke stopped. As the air cleared, Gillian, staring, made out the forms of the three men. One was sitting up. That was Richard Fowler. Prince Kouang was stretched out on the floor. He, too, sat up and vaguely shook his head.

The Sultan did not move. His black lips were slightly parted. His eyes, open, were gazing up through the square hole in the ceiling at trailing wisps of purple smoke.

Richard Fowler arose from the bamboo rack and walked unsteadily toward Janet. There was a sleepy smile at his lips—sleepy, but a smile, the smile he had not worn since the first *nat* ceremony. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

But Gillian was not watching them. His eyes darted from the recumbent Sultan to the High Priest.

Prince Kouang had arisen. He was looking down at his brother with a strange, satisfied smile. Then he turned and looked at Gillian. His expressive black eyebrows gave a little lift. It somehow broke the tension. Gillian walked over.

Behind him he heard young Fowler laughing. Later, Gillian knew, the young man would marvel at the fact that he had, through the powers of Prince Kouang, regained his soul. But Gillian did not smile. Prince Kouang fascinated him. Here, he realized, was a man clever enough and ruthless enough to realize what had been, in his brother, a crazy dream; a man, in short, with brains enough to organize and lead the awakened races of the benighted East.

"My brother is dead," Prince Kou-

ang said. "My experiment — alas — was a failure."

GILLIAN made no comment. He waited. He was certain that he had guessed Prince Kouang's designs down to the ultimate detail. And he admired this man for an ingenuity sheerly diabolical. How many years, Gillian wondered, had the high priest of Senang devoted to this plan, this elaborate assassination, which would insure his occupying the Senangese throne? How many previous opportunities had he seized and discarded? He had built up his weak brother's superstitious belief in *nats*—over how many years?

Gillian knew that he would never learn the inner facts, but he would not have been surprised to be told that Richard Fowler's murder of Ezra Meeker had been cunningly planned by Prince Kouang, and that the young man had been systematically dosed with some subtle oriental drug which rendered him half-mad and opium-hungry.

There was no doubt in Gillian's mind that Kouang had cleverly induced the Sultan to stage this farcical trial with the promise that the Sultan would exchange his soul for Gillian's.

It was an amazing glimpse into the workings of an oriental master mind. And it left Gillian perfectly satisfied that Prince Kouang was not his enemy.

The new Sultan of Senang was gazing down at Gillian, and there was a sparkle of mirth in the black eyes.

"Mr. Hazeltine, it has been a pleasure to observe your brilliant mind in action. My first official act as the new Sultan of Senang will be unconditionally to pardon Richard Fowler."

"Thank you—your majesty."

"Captain Yanglat!" called Kouang.

"Yes, your majesty!"

"You will escort Mr. Hazeltine and his friends to the Lotus immediately. All of your belongings, Mr. Hazeltine, and those of your friends have been taken aboard. You will find everything in the respective staterooms. I wish you a pleasant journey."

Gillian gripped his hand. Thus did that most dangerous of oriental princes pass out of Gillian's existence.

Gillian found his belongings neatly stowed in the room he had occupied on the Lotus on the trip upriver. And he found something else. On the dresser was a green envelope, and upon the envelope was a small, square satinwood box inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

He opened the envelope first and read, in black ink, in a vigorous hand:

In appreciation of your services, I am conferring upon you the Senangese Order of the Fire Opal. Among the peoples of the world the opal is looked upon as a stone of ill fortune. But only fools are superstitious.

KOUANG,

Sultan of Senang.

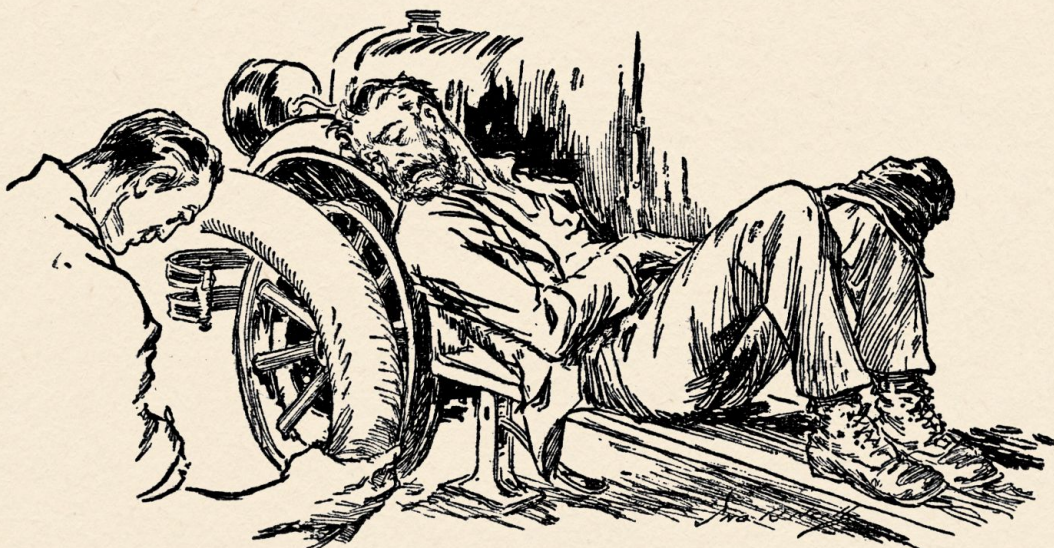
Gillian thought that over for some time. Only fools are superstitious! Only fools believe in the evil powers of opals—and only fools believe in *nats*!

He opened the box. He would not have been surprised if a puff of purple smoke had arisen.

Upon a little white satin bed glowed a tremendous fire opal. It was surrounded by twinkling, sparkling diamonds—large fellows. They took fire from the opal, and the opal blazed more brightly because of them. The collection of gems in their quaint gold mounting would make a brilliant and beautiful brooch for a lady.

Fortunately, Mrs. Hazeltine was not superstitious.

THE END.



"Ain't that too bad! Now, if it was minin' machinery I could help you fix it"

Hokum Valley

Some say a man can be too clever for his own good; but nobody could have told Lazy Lou Hickey that, while he was working his grubstake racket so successfully

By ANDREW THICKSTUN

"LIFT, pardner?" "Well, I rather reckon yes," responded the loosely knit desert rat as he deposited the scant pack between the hood and fender regardless of damage to the paint and clambered into the car.

"How far yuh goin'?" queried the passenger as the little coupé was again bumping along the uneven wheel tracks.

"Red Ash," announced Jerry Cotter, the friendly young driver.

"Never heerd of it."

"New boom camp just sprung up. Hundred dollars to the pan at grass roots. Two boys digging out a den of coyotes located it. The ground's staked out for miles around. Some of the claims sold for a quarter of a million."

A mile more of lurch—bump—lurch

and ploof! Left front casing blown out.

It'd be sweaty, disagreeable work to fix it, Jerry Cotter knew; but with his passenger to help, the work would be halved. Cotter had reckoned too hastily, however.

"Now ain't that jest too bad," deplored the hitch-hiker. "If'n it was minin' machinery I'd be jest the bucko to fix it. But I don't know nothin' about autymobiles." The desert rat settled his denims comfortably on the shady side of the car before Jerry could assure him that the task was none too technical for a novice.

"Hickey's my name," he offered. "Louisiana Hickey, they calls me. Mostly jest Lou for short." The fact that "Lazy Lou" was the name by which the mining towns of Nevada

knew him, he neglected to mention. "How yuh fixed for smokin'?"

Jerry completed unrolling the tool kit and fished out a pack of cigarettes. The grimy paw Hickey extended was free of calluses. He now stretched luxuriously along the running board puffing contentment as one accustomed to solid comfort.

"I been prospectin' this here desert for over twenty year and never struck pay dirt yet," allowed Mr. Hickey, unanimously electing himself entertaining committee. "Played in hard luck all m' life."

"How do you manage bacon and beans then?"

"Git grubstaked."

"I've heard of the system. How's it worked?"

"Easy. Some feller with money—storekeeper f'r instance, like ol' Holden Jacobs—furnishes the grub for a fifty-fifty split in what you diskiver. Ol' Jacobs staked clost to a hunnerd prospectors in his day. Finally drove him to bankruptcy. Then he blowed his haid off. He staked me them two year I spent in Hokum Valley. Right sweet place—Hokum Valley. Plenty of water and grass. Ol' Shirt-Tail John, the Ute, lives there. Shirt-Tail had three squaws. Bein' Injun he's too lazy to work; but he's an easy trader. And ol' Jacobs wasn't stingy with the grub. Me and Shirt-Tail managed purty good." A greasy grin slid around behind the tobacco-ambered whiskers.

"**H**OKUM VALLEY?" queried Cotter, as he wiped the sweat from his eyes and screwed the pump to the valve of the just patched tube. "Never heard of it."

"No, I don't reckon so. Nobody else did. Not by that name. That's m' own private code word. Don't

expect no white folks but me was ever there. But it was a swell place for me to rest up, them two years afore Jacobs's creditors closed him out. It's the kind of place these book writers calls a o-asis. Only spring for fifty mile, ringed around with desert hills. Three brown buttes right in the middle with red rim rock tops. Ol' Jacobs thought I was out in the hot sun all that time a pickin' an' a shovelin'. Hokum Valley! Ketch the point?"

Cotter caught the point, all right, as he tightened the last rim nut and removed the jack with his blistered hands.

"No mineral in your Hokum Valley?" he grunted.

"No-o, I don't calculate there was. I really was gonna pick around some this season. But then ol' Jacobs commits sooercide and I never had the chanst to go back. The feller that staked me this year made me go out north of where you picked me up. He sneaked into camp last night—the dirty pussy-foot. It's been so hot I hadn't done no work. Never imagined he'd be low-down and come out to spy on me. Kicked me out to starve, he did. That's why I was a waitin' there by the road when you come along."

FIFTY miles more of ruddy trail and the coupé began to climb barren brown hills—the summit of which and the boiling point of the radiator were reached simultaneously. Cotter cut the switch and set the brakes. The hot wind blew the enveloping dust-shroud down the slope.

The desert-scape below shimmered into view. Three dusty brown buttes reared red sandstone heads from the center of a bowl-shaped valley. Jerry Cotter was lost in the naked romance of the seething scene below. Men—horses — m u l e s — tractors — dyna-

mite blasts! The new boom camp in the frenzy of being. The voice of the forgotten desert rat recalled him.

"Sa-a-y, what place is this here?" The query a plaint.

"Must be Red Ash," replied Jerry Cotter, jolted back to the present by the hysterical note in the old cheater's voice.

"That million-dollar gold strike?"

Jerry Cotter nodded affirmation and eased around in the seat so as to get an unobstructed swing at the other's jaw if necessary, for the desert rat was acting strangely. Face all mottled—eyes protruding—voice high and

strident. Half-baked in truth. Too many years of desert sun, Jerry decided.

Lazy Lou Hickey flung out poignant arms toward the seething scene below, where fortunes were being made hourly:

"Don't yuh see them red-topped buttes—that nacheral bowl of a valley—that circle o' hills? That green place there is the spring where Shirt-Tail John and me camped for two year!" His voice rose to a piercing wail. "Didn't I tell yuh I never had no luck in all m' borned days? Why, man alive, *that there is Hokum Valley!*"

THE END.



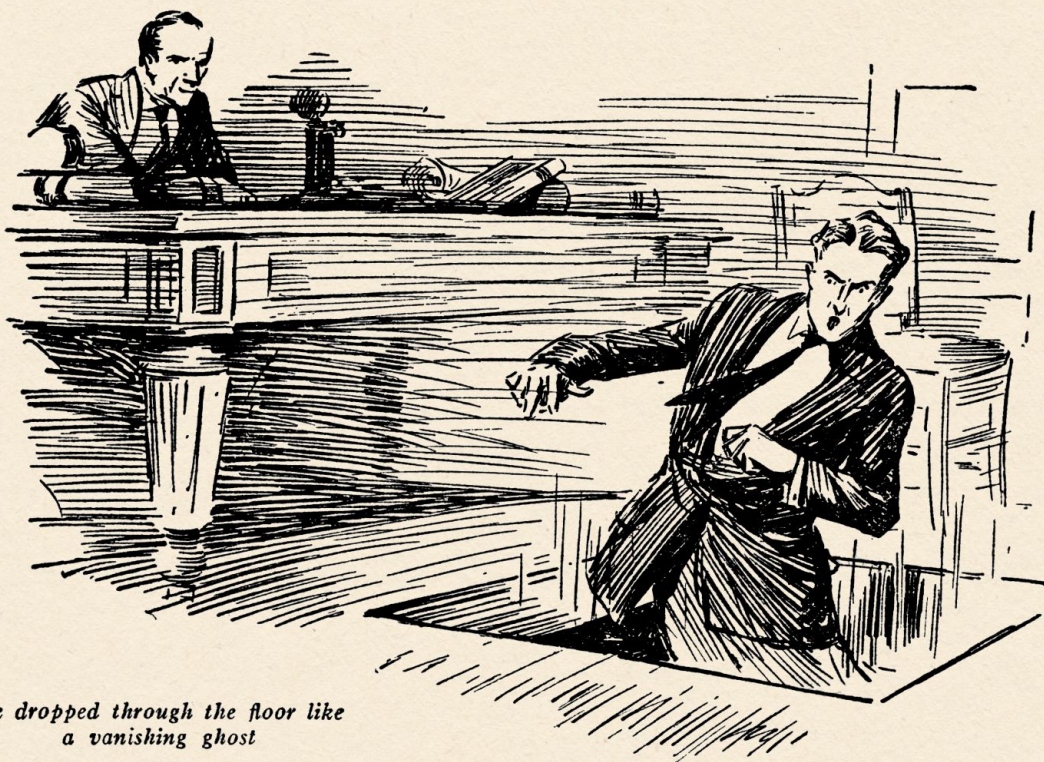
Spring Magic

THE spring, which turns a young man's fancy to thoughts of rhyming "dove" with "love," and "you" with "goo," has always moved the minds of primitive and simple peoples to thoughts of magic and charms. To the savage mind the revival of vegetation after its long winter sleep was nothing short of miraculous, and failure to observe it with proper magical ceremonies would be disastrous. Among African savages such ceremonies took the form of dances, sacred songs and incantations, and they were usually attended by sacrifice, sometimes of animals, sometimes of human beings. Natives of Central Australia long practiced elaborate rites to usher in spring and make the animal and vegetable life more abundant.

Formerly in Chinese cities processions were held on the first day of spring. An image of an ox was made of colored paper and set at the city gate. The mandarins at the head of the procession beat the ox to pieces with colored rods and set fire to the fragments. Then the populace scrambled for the pieces of burning paper. A person fortunate enough to get one was sure to have plenty to eat and the best of luck during the year.

European peasants have adopted many quaint and colorful ceremonies for bringing in the spring. In many villages it was the custom to make a hideous straw man, which represented winter, carry him out of the village at the head of a jeering mob, and tear him to pieces. Following the demolition of the effigy, the people returned singing praises of spring, and had a great feast. One village which failed to observe this rite is said to have met with disaster in the form of drought and sickness. Fragments of the straw man were in great demand, for fed to a mare they were sure to make her foal, while if planted in the fields they insured a bountiful crop.

Vincent B. Wilson.



*He dropped through the floor like
a vanishing ghost*

The Legacy of Peril

*Digging into an old crime that may unseat the gangster czar of Manhattan,
Ted Glenn finds to his horror that the long arm of the
lawless can reach across State lines*

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Man of Gold," "The Wrong Kind of Money," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

TED GLENN, clerking in Tom Mullen's haberdashery near Times Square, narrowly escapes death when two of Ollie Harmon's gunmen kill the rival gangster, Armstein, in the store. Mullen, fatally wounded, bequeathes his eighty thousand dollars to Ted if he secures Harmon's conviction for any murder.

Harmon, suspicious, has the letter of instructions stolen, and the executor,

Sanford, flees for Europe. Harmon gets Ted involved in a rum-running scheme; he is arrested, identified, then allowed to escape. But Harmon's beautiful mistress, Laura Demerest, jealous of the boss racketeer's attentions to Armstein's former sweetheart, Doll Dean, warns Ted that Harmon is planning to gratify his own humorous sense of power by getting his hands on Mullen's bequest, then bumping Ted off. She

This story began in the Argosy for September 27.

tells Ted that Harmon had murdered an old woman, Mary Green, in Worcester, back in 1920, and urges him to get the goods on him for it.

In Worcester, Sally Sleeper, whom Ted loves, urges him to give up his mad attempt.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE OLD WAR HORSE.

TED GLENN descended from the train at Franklyn and walked about half a mile to the small frame house where retired Sergeant Dennis Murphy resided with his widowed daughter. As he turned in at the gate he saw the old man sitting on the screened-in porch and knew that his second visit was not made in vain.

Mr. Murphy rose as he saw the stranger coming up the path and opened the screen door. Ted saw a stocky man with a solid jaw, a big nose and a pair of bright blue eyes. He wore his hair pompadour and there was a lot of black in it. Murphy was well on toward seventy, but he did not look sixty. And in his eyes there was the light of intelligence.

"My name is Ross," said Ted. "Are you Sergeant Murphy?"

"That's right," replied the ex-detective. "You're the lad who was here last week?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come in and sit down. My daughter is washing out back and she ain't presentable. Sit right here on the porch. It's a fine day."

"Splendid."

"You told my daughter you were a writer," said Murphy. "A reporter from a Boston paper?"

"No, a magazine writer. I'm interested in murder mysteries, sergeant."

Murphy deliberately filled his pipe and a droll light came into his eyes.

"You came to the wrong shop," he said. "When I worked on a murder case it wasn't a mystery long. I read a lot of detective stories now that I'm on the shelf and most of them make me sick. Man alive, nine murders out of ten are a cinch to solve. In my time I've sent a dozen men to the chair. Of course a detective has to know his business, which is more than these fellows in the story books do."

"Then you've always solved the mysteries you worked on?"

"Well, almost always. Of course you have to have something to go on."

"You had a great reputation in Worcester, I am informed," Ted said guilefully.

"Sure I had. It's a crime to retire a man just because he has reached a certain age, if his mind is all right and he has his health. You take this Sinnott case they are working on now. Say, I bet I'd have cleaned that up in a week. I suppose you want my opinion on who killed George Sinnott?"

"As a matter of fact I'm not interested in that," admitted Ted. "I happened to hear about an interesting case which occurred ten years ago, and I'm informed you were in charge of it. The Mary Green murder. That was never solved, I believe."

"Oh, that," said Murphy, with some embarrassment. "It was so long ago I forgot it. Well, I admit that it was a tough one. Nobody could have solved it unless he got a lucky break. I didn't get the break."

"Can you tell me something about it?"

"Well, let's see," reflected Murphy. "Mrs. Green was a bit queer, you know. Her husband left her plenty of money, but what did she do but turn

it all into cash and hide it in her mattress! In the course of time the word got round that she had a lot of money in the house. Well, she was murdered, and a nice job it was, too."

"Can you give me any details?"

"Let's see. She slept in a big square room on the second floor front. She slept with her windows closed and locked, even in summer. Lots of old women do that. When we arrived she was lying cold, strangled in her bed, and the windows were still locked. The bedroom door was open, the way the cleaning woman, Mrs. Ragan, left it. She said she found it unlocked. We inspected the house and found no evidence of a break, so I figured that the murderer let himself in the front door with a key."

"Did the front door have a cylinder lock?"

"No, an old-fashioned one. Any key would have opened it."

"**W**ERE there any clews?"

"None that were any help.

The motive was evident—robbery. It was the work of a clever thief, of course, which eliminated any of the neighbors and fixed it upon the criminal element. There wasn't a relative who would know about the money and be impatient to inherit. It was a crook, all right. Usually we're glad to be sure of that because the police have ways of tracing a crook."

"You arrested one man, I believe."

"The chief did that against my advice and we had to release him. He was a garage man who once in a while took Mrs. Green for a ride around town. We figured he knew she had a lot of money in the house and there wasn't anybody else to suspect and the papers were yelling for an arrest. Well, it turned out that this fellow went up

to Boston that night, got in a fight on Hanover Street, was pinched and spent the night in jail. So that let him out. Besides his finger-prints didn't fit."

"Oh, you found a finger-print!" exclaimed Ted.

Murphy laughed. "It was queer about that. I figured that the murderer wore gloves. There were no prints about the house and none on the dead woman's neck where he strangled her—that is, there were red marks of fingers, but no prints. We went over the doors and windows and knobs and all that sort of thing and got nothing. Now it happened that the old lady slept in a big, polished mahogany bed that was glossy because she went over it every few days with an oil rag.

"Well, after he killed the woman, he cut a slit in the mattress, got down on his knees and thrust his hand in and felt around. He must have taken the glove off his right hand to feel better in the excelsior, because we found on the mahogany side of the bed, right at the slit in the mattress, the impression of a thumb, first finger and second finger. Elegant prints they were, too."

"But with those you ought to have found the murderer," commented Ted.

"Yeah? Young feller, there are a hundred and twenty million people in this country, and a hundred and nineteen million, nine hundred and fifty thousand never had their finger-prints registered. We know they were not made by Mrs. Green or Mrs. Ragan and they were fresh so it was a cinch they were made by the murderer."

"There was nothing in the papers about that discovery."

"We never give out that sort of thing."

"And even with the prints you couldn't discover who killed Mrs. Green?"

"No. We rounded up every hard character in Worcester and we sent photographs of the print to every police headquarters in the country, but they were never identified. The murderer was a fellow who had never been arrested and had measurements or prints taken. I guess he hasn't been since, for every now and then they send out new photographs and they are compared with recent registrations all over the country."

"Then these prints are still in existence!" exclaimed Ted excitedly.

"Sure they are. The police never quit looking for a murderer. Of course they have other business to attend to, and after a while they don't do much about an unsolved case, but you'd be surprised how many killers are nabbed after years have passed."

"If a man was found whose prints were identical, you would have no trouble convicting him, I suppose?"

"Well, that depends on the jury, lad. Once in a great while two fingers of different people are just alike. I never met such a case, but I've read of them. It's not likely that the prints of three fingers of two different people would be identical. But they are not enough to convict. You have to prove that the man was in or near the place where the murder was committed at that time, and that he had a reason for the crime. If you prove that, and then produce finger-prints found in the room of the murdered person and show that the prisoner had no right to be there, why almost any jury would convict him of the crime. I'd say it was a cinch."

"Suppose I produced duplicates of these prints and gave the police the name of the person who had made them, would they arrest him?"

"You bet your life they would," de-

clared Murphy. "Say, can you do that?"

"SUPPOSE this man was high in politics and had tremendous influence in New York City, would it make any difference?"

"To a Massachusetts chief of police? Not a bit."

"But you'd have to extradite him from New York, and he has enormous influence."

"You prove to us that his fingerprints are the same as those I found on that bedstead and he'll be extradited. The President of the United States couldn't save him." Murphy threw down his pipe and grasped Ted by the arm. "You talk as though you knew who killed Mrs. Green. I'm on the retired list, but I'd still give a few years of my life to bring that murderer to book."

"Frankly," said Ted, "I think I know the murderer. I can show that he had means of learning that Mrs. Green kept a large sum of money in her house and that he was in Worcester on the night of the murder. But I haven't got his finger-prints and I don't know how to get them."

"Have him pinched on any kind of a charge and tip off the police what we really want."

Ted shook his head. "Unfortunately this man is so powerful that he can't be reached. And the New York police would be much more likely to protect him than to coöperate with the Worcester police. I don't think he can be arrested in New York."

"Who the deuce is he, the mayor?"

"He is a much more powerful man than the mayor. He is the head of organized crime in New York City."

"What's his name?" demanded Murphy. "Say, I'll go over with you

at my own expense and nab him. Some feather in my cap if I should walk into police headquarters in Worcester and say, 'Here's the man who killed Mary Green ten years ago and here's the evidence.'"

"Did you ever hear of Ollie Harmon?" asked Ted.

Murphy scratched his head. "Can't say I have."

Glenn smiled. Ollie might control New York, but he would have no more influence in Worcester than any other murderer.

"You understand that I have nothing that could be considered evidence," he stated. "Through underground channels I have been told certain things, but the person who told me would never testify against Harmon."

"Get the finger-prints," urged Murphy. "If they are the same, we'll convict him; and, by the way"—he gazed searchingly at Ted—"what's your interest in sending a man to the electric chair?"

"I have reasons that will satisfy you," replied the young man. "The most important is that if Harmon continues to live he'll make an end of me at the first opportunity."

Murphy grinned. "Reason enough. I'm in on this case, lad. Say, I've been vegetating here for years wishing there was something for me to do. The Green case was one of my failures. We'll turn it into a success!"

CHAPTER XIX.

ULTIMATUM.

TED returned to Worcester with the consciousness of a profitable trip. Until he had encountered Sergeant Murphy he had been completely at a standstill in the Green case.

Unlike most investigators of murder mysteries, he started with the identity of the murderer complete, but with no evidence against him of any legal value.

Now, assuming that Laura Demerest had told him the truth, he had proof enough to send Harmon to the chair. There was no doubt in Ted's mind that the finger-prints upon the bedstead of Mrs. Green were those of Ollie Harmon. All that was necessary was to secure Ollie's finger-prints for comparison. That was all . . .

For ten years Harmon had been looting and pillaging in New York City, safe in the center of a ring of bold and vicious criminals. That he was the instigator and chief beneficiary of hundreds of robberies, swindles and other law violations was generally known. That he had ordered the killing of scores of persons was common talk. Yet so cleverly had he operated that the police were powerless to touch him.

He flouted the law and defied the authorities with impunity. During these ten years many of his followers had been arrested and some had been convicted, but none of these had ever dared to implicate Ollie Harmon. Politicians feared him, business men were in terror of him and paid him tribute. And all this time, in the archives of the police in Worcester was evidence enough to secure his death sentence.

All that was now necessary was to get his finger-prints. In the first flush of enthusiasm Ted assumed that it would be easy. He now began to realize that it was almost impossible.

Legally the police may only take the measurements of persons convicted of a crime; actually they photograph, measure and make finger-prints of any

person whom they place under arrest and from whom they fear no come-back.

In the case of a rich and powerful individual like Harmon there was no chance that the Worcester authorities could persuade the New York police to arrest him on suspicion and fingerprint him. Harmon was suspected by the police of the big town of being responsible for many killings, but they dared not arrest him. An intimation from Worcester that they had something on Harmon would be passed on to the racketeer by his henchmen in police headquarters in New York and would only serve to put him on his guard.

There was no chance that ex-Sergeant Murphy could reach Ollie Harmon and forcibly obtain his fingerprints. Nobody reached Harmon without first identifying himself and satisfying the bodyguard that an interview would be to Ollie's advantage. An attempt by Murphy to force himself upon the criminal would probably end in the old detective's being "taken for a ride."

Laura Demerest could perhaps get Ollie's finger-prints, but Sally Sleeper, with her woman's understanding of the emotions and mental processes of her own sex, had insisted that Laura was not to be trusted. When it came to the point of performing the act that would irrevocably doom the man she had once loved she was very likely to rally to his side.

Ted had argued about this at length with Sally. Wasn't it true that Laura had been abused by Harmon? Hadn't she sent Ted to Worcester to get the evidence which would convict her old lover? Hadn't she advanced him money for his expenses?

"I don't care," replied Sally. "She

might do all those things as mad as she was and still rush to his rescue at the last minute. She must have loved him if she put up with bad treatment for years, and when a girl has loved a man she won't deliberately send him to his death; her betrayal to you was a thing of momentary jealous rage. She considers you as nothing but a tool. She would betray you as quick as she would look at you."

Because he was in love with Sally, and because he had ample evidence of her sturdy common sense Ted had agreed that she was probably right. He couldn't trust Laura Demerest.

WITHOUT the finger-prints of Ollie Harmon he was no better off than upon the day he left New York. If the murderer of Mary Green were ever to be punished, it was up to Ted Glenn.

There was a chance that he could get into the presence of the big racketeer. Harmon wanted to lay his hands on Tom Mullen's money and he needed Ted Glenn to get it for him. Laura had told him that and no doubt she was speaking the truth. Suppose he went back to New York and gave himself up, so to speak.

Wasn't it likely that Harmon would send for him and, after bawling him out for fleeing from New York, would forgive him temporarily and make use of him? And if he got into Ollie's presence, there must be some way in which he could get impressions of the man's finger-tips. Murphy would know how to do it. Detectives had a lot of tricks that they used.

Murphy was coming into Worcester the following day. The old man was delighted to have a chance to get away from his front porch and he wanted to visit police headquarters and make

sure that the finger-prints of the murderer of Mary Green were still on file. Ted would get together with Murphy and they would work out a plan.

Sally was leaving the next morning. The vibrator had gone very well in Worcester and the demonstrators had spent two extra days in town. Sally had delivered an ultimatum. If Ted agreed to go to Canada as soon as he returned from his visit to Franklyn, she would leave the demonstrators and go with him to Montreal. After each had found a job they would be married. If he still clung to his purpose, however, she would go on to Boston with the company.

Ted was not a coward, but he dreaded to go back to New York. It was like putting his head into the lion's mouth. He had ample demonstration of the power and ruthlessness of Ollie Harmon, and of his guile. Mentally he knew he was no match for the arch-criminal—how had the man discovered the secret of Mullen's legacy, a thing known only to Ted and Sanford? It was ten to one, if he returned to New York, that he would be grabbed and used by Harmon and then smashed like a buzzing mosquito.

But if he won—well, the man who had so shamefully treated him would be adequately punished and Mr. Sanford would reward Ted with Mullen's eighty thousand dollars. Poor old Tom had said he would be pulling for Ted's success from the place where he had gone.

Right and justice were on his side. If he won, he and Sally would not have to be exiles in a foreign country, living on a pittance. They could marry and have enough to get along comfortably until he established himself in some business.

It was a great temptation to go at

once to Montreal with Sally. It would be wonderful to be married to her, even if they had no money. Of course he would be haunted all his life by the thought that he was a quitter and Sally, even though she loved him, would know that he had left the United States because he was afraid of Ollie Harmon.

He had to decide before six thirty when he was having dinner with Sally in the cafeteria of the Hotel Bancroft. At six twenty-nine, he made up his mind.

"SALLY, darling," he said, when they had unloaded their trays onto a cozy table in a corner and seated themselves to smile at each other from across the table. "I saw Sergeant Murphy to-day and I received some great news. The murderer of Mary Green left his finger-prints on the bedstead the night he killed the old lady. All we have to do is to compare them with those of Harmon and we have him."

"Yes?" questioned Sally, seeing the difficulty at once. "How are you going to get them?"

"Well, Sergeant Murphy is all steamed up. It seems that his failure in this case always rankled and he is coming down to Worcester to-morrow to work with me."

"Then you're not going to Montreal to-night?" she said sharply.

He grasped her hand and tried to squeeze it, but she pulled it away.

"I can't go to-night, Sally. Why, don't you see, we are close to success! I have a chance to get the legacy."

"It isn't because you don't love me?"

"Sally, I'm crazy about you."

"Well— How are you and this superannuated hick policeman going

to get the finger-prints of this big New York crook? Ask him to give them to you?"

"We've got to work that out, dear," he said evasively.

"Ted Glenn, I forbid you to go back to New York. They'll murder you."

"Sergeant Murphy wants to go to New York. He has friends there on the force and he's going to make inquiries."

"And you propose to go with him. Don't lie, Ted. That's your plan, isn't it?"

"I've got to, darling," he admitted.

"I don't want money," she exclaimed. "We love each other. What more do we want?"

"You think you love me, but if I were a quitter you couldn't love me very long."

"You don't have to prove your courage to me, dear," she said earnestly. "I've seen you in action. Forget it and we'll take a train to-night to Montreal. I'll marry you in the morning if you want me to."

Ted's eyes filled with tears and he gulped. "I don't deserve you, Sally," he said in a voice that broke.

"You've got me whether you deserve me or not," she said with a bright smile. "Go get the railroad tickets."

He shook his head.

"I've got to see this through, dear," he replied. "I thought Mullen was mad when he offered me his money if I would bring Harmon to justice. There didn't seem any way to get at a man like that. And when Harmon found out what I was about and had me captured by the Revenue officers I was completely in despair. Now I know there is a Higher Power which objects to the existence of murderous thieves like Harmon."

"The first break for me was when

Harmon thought that I was a joke and that it would be entertaining to pocket the fortune which Mullen left to secure his conviction. The next break was when he threw off this Demerest woman and she showed me the weak link in his armor. And now it appears that he foozled the job in Mary Green's house that night and left finger-prints on her bedstead to identify him. Don't you see that Providence is running this show? I'm no detective. I would not know a clew if it bit me, but I happen to be an instrument of justice and I can't lie down on the job at this stage of the game.

"Just as sure as Fate I'm going to get Ollie Harmon's finger-prints and the Worcester police, who don't give a damn about the importance of Harmon in New York, will yank him over here and convict him and send him to the chair. Don't you see?"

"I see that you have yourself hypnotized," replied Sally glumly. "Well, I'll go back to New York, too. I suppose you are going to see that Demerest woman."

"No. I'll keep away from her. I think you are right about her."

"Certainly, I'm right. No woman wants the man she once loved sentenced to death. It's as certain as it is that a woman who has loved a man will never forgive the woman or man who takes him from her."

"By George!" exclaimed Ted.

"What?"

"Oh, just an idea. It's not in shape to explain it."

"I don't trust your ideas much," she said dubiously. "When are you going to New York?"

"In a couple of days."

"Well, I'll go to Boston with the vibrator people and leave them there. You can run down to Boston to meet

me and we'll go over on the train together."

THEY spent an artless evening; saw a film and sat until late in the lobby of the hotel. Sally put up her pretty mouth to be kissed good night, about one in the morning, and left on a seven thirty train before Ted was awake.

Their engagement had had no formal beginning. After the conference and confession in the waiting room of the railroad station, each took it for granted that they belonged to each other. They were deeply in love and neither was very coherent in expression of their mutual emotion.

Ted laid awake for an hour after he parted from his sweetheart and turned over and developed his idea. Sally's statement that a woman who had loved a man could never go to the last extreme in her hate while a woman whose lover somebody had taken from her was always eager for revenge on the thief, had put the thing in his mind.

Laura Demerest had told him that Harmon had taken up with Doll Dean which was the last straw with her. Ted had not mentioned that he knew Doll Dean and he had not thought at the time that it was strange that the blond young woman should become friendly with the man who had brought about the murder of her lover, Louis Armstein.

Now he was going over his interview with Doll. He remembered how the tears had streamed down her hard face as he told how Louis had died with a blazing gun in his hand. And she had confessed that she had broken with Louis at his insistence, not, as was supposed, because she resented the loss of the money and jewels he had given her.

There was no doubt that she had been in love with Louis. Now it appeared that she had cut out Laura Demerest with Ollie Harmon. Most likely it was because he was rich and powerful and could lift her into affluence; but if Sally was right, she hated Harmon and would gladly revenge herself upon him.

In that case, Miss Dean and not Miss Demerest might be his ally. Laura, if she had been abandoned by Harmon, could not easily get close enough to him to secure the finger impressions, but Doll, if she were living with him, might.

Ted, honestly and sincerely in love with Sally, was not eager to be associated with either of these sin-speckled women, and Doll was more repulsive to him than Laura. But Doll had appeared to like him. She had gone to the trouble of arranging work for him with R. Z. Schultz. He might see her and get a line upon her attitude toward Harmon. Anyway he would talk this angle of the situation over with Murphy and find out how that veteran of criminal investigation regarded it.

The way he would have preferred to proceed was to burst in upon Harmon, overpower him and take his finger-prints by force. From what he had learned about Ollie, there was no chance whatever of such an opportunity.

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNWILLING GUEST.

GLENN rose at nine o'clock, breakfasted leisurely and returned to his room. To his astonishment there was a man in his room, a broad-shouldered, solidly built individual with a long face and a pair of gimle

eyes. This person sat with an automatic pistol in his lap which he lifted and pointed at Ted as he entered.

"How are ye, Glenn," he said gruffly. "I'm a stranger to you but a mutual friend wanted me to call and see how you was."

"How—how did you get in here?" stammered Ted.

The visitor grinned, demonstrating that his teeth were bad.

"Cinch," he replied. "Got a gun on you?"

Glenn shook his head.

"Turn around and back up here till I frisk you."

Sullenly, Ted obeyed the order. The fellow tapped his hip and side pockets and felt under his arms and was satisfied.

"Go over and sit on the bed. Close the door first."

With a sinking heart, Ted followed instructions.

"So you thought you could make your get-away," sneered the stranger. "All you had to do was to take a train for somewhere and the boss could never find you. You poor sap!"

Glenn made no reply. He was in no mood for talking, but the gunman was chatty.

"Fine return you made for kindness," he continued. "You go out on a job and get pinched right off the bat. The boss goes to a lot of trouble and expense to spring you. And what do you do? You beat it. Hanged if I know why the chief bothered about you. He ought to have let the Revenue men pick you up and send you to Atlanta. Instead of that he just invites you to come back to New York for a conference."

Ted pricked up his ears. He had been studying the fellow and wondering what his chances would be if he

jumped him—slim, probably, though the man was handling his gun carelessly. But a conference; that meant that Harmon wanted to see him. Just let him be alone in a room with the oily scoundrel for a couple of minutes and he would get the finger-prints. Pour ink on a sheet of paper and jab the crook's hands on it. That ought to do it.

"How did you trace me here?" Ted asked with assumed curiosity.

"Sashez the femmy," replied the gunman. Ted assumed he meant, "*Cherchez la femme*."

"You had a skirt in New York that went down to New Brunswick to bring you flowers in your cell," said Harmon's man. "When she found you was gone she went to Prohibition headquarters after you. Well, all we had to do was to watch her. We trailed her to New Haven, Hartford, Springfield and here. I could have nabbed you any time, but I was waiting for orders."

So the hounds had followed poor little Sally. With the best intentions in the world she had delivered him to his enemy. Well, Harmon would pay for that too.

"What brung you to this burg?" demanded his captor curiously. "I'd ha' thought you would make for Chicago or Boston or Frisco."

"I—I had a cousin in Worcester. I hoped he would find a job for me," said Ted glibly. The man's question betrayed his ignorance of Ted's business in Worcester. Probably Harmon would assume that it was a coincidence that he had fled to the scene of Ollie's first murder. If he had the slightest suspicion that it was not a coincidence, Ted knew he was practically a dead man.

The gunman's lip curled in a sneer. "Going to go straight, were yer? Say,

you're in the gang, feller, and the only way you'll leave it will be feet first. You go ahead and pack that suitcase over there. You and me are taking a train in half an hour for little old New York. Step on the gas."

THERE was nothing to do but pack his few belongings. He had come here without even a toothbrush in his possession but he had purchased linen and toilet articles and a small suitcase. It took him ten minutes to pack.

"I'm willing to go back to New York," he said finally. "You don't have to flourish that gun."

"I'll have it handy," replied the man significantly. "We'll ride in the smoking car, see, and you'll sit by the window. If you think I wouldn't plug you on a train if you got fresh, you're dippy. Say, I'd drill you, cover the gang in the car with my gun, pull the bell rope, stop the train, grab the first auto that came along and get away like a bird."

Ted managed a smile. "I don't doubt it, but I won't inconvenience you to such an extent. The fact is, I was a fool to leave New York, but I wasn't a member of the organization long and I was afraid the Federal men might get me. I ought to have known that if Ollie could have me turned loose, he had pull enough to make them keep their hands off."

"Any time one of our mob goes up the river," the other assured him, "It's because he's in bad. Ollie takes care of his own. You'll probably wish you'd never been born before he gets through with you for what you done. My orders is to bring you back to New York and that lets me out."

"Do—do you think he'll have me killed?" asked Ted anxiously.

"Well, if he wanted that done I could have done it right here in Worcester. I guess he needs you for something, but you'll get plenty for running out on him."

"I'll play the game from now on," Ted assured him.

"Oh, sure you will. Come on."

With his guardian close beside him, Ted paid his bill and took a taxi a few blocks to the station. He wished there were some way in which he could communicate with ex-Sergeant Murphy, but it was out of the question to make an attempt. Murphy would be puzzled and angry to find that he had left the hotel, but there was nothing Ted could do about it. He was glad that Sally was safely out of the way. How could he explain to her his failure to meet her in Boston as he had promised?

In a most unhappy frame of mind, he boarded the train and settled down beside his captor in the smoking car. Four and a half dreary hours to New York. After that his fate was in the hands of the gods.

The trip was dull and without incident. He accompanied the gunman to the dining car and observed that the fellow had a hearty appetite and bad table manners. They arrived at the Grand Central and took a taxi to the Blitz Hotel.

"You're still registered here," the gunman assured him. "And your duds are in your room. We kind of thought you'd be back."

Ted grinned feebly. "Very nice of you," he retorted. "What happens next?"

"You stay in your room till you get your orders. I'll phone headquarters that you're at home."

At the entrance to the hotel his captor left him. He thrust out his hand as they parted.

"You ain't a bad kid," he declared. "I hope they don't give you the works too hard."

"Thanks," replied Ted. "You were very considerate under the circumstances."

He stopped at the desk to ask for his key and was handed several letters. Three were from Mrs. Potter Waring who wondered what had become of him. One contained the radiogram sent to his old address by Sanford and forwarded by his former landlady.

Much had happened since Sanford sent his radiogram and it was too late to take his advice, but Ted was grateful for his good intentions.

HE went up to his room and found it exactly as he had left it. On his table was a hotel bill and two letters, unopened, bearing the imprint of the Mammoth National. They each contained a check from the bank for one hundred and fifty dollars. Evidently the flight of Sanford had not affected the arrangement by which he was to receive a weekly check from the Mullen estate.

He took a bath and changed his linen and fretted for an hour before the ringing of his phone announced that his fate was about to be settled.

"You are expected by Mr. Hertz at six o'clock. You know where."

"All right," he said sullenly, and hung up.

It was nearly five and a fifteen minute taxi ride would take him to Harmon's residence. Hertz, he remembered, was the secretary. What would happen at the interview? Ted had no stomach for it. He was strongly tempted to run out into the street and make another effort to get out of New York, but he overcame the temptation. For one thing, he undoubtedly was

watched and would not be permitted to go far. For another, the opportunity, for which he had refused to escape with Sally to Canada, was at hand. He was inclined to regret that he had not taken the night train for Montreal with Sally, but it was too late now. And the agreeable gunman would probably have been on hand to prevent their departure.

He was about to enter the presence of the murderer, Ollie Harmon, but he did not know how he could use the fact to his advantage. Ted knew no more about the business of finger-printing than the average man, and he didn't know how Ollie's could be secured without his knowledge and consent. If only he had had a chance to consult with Murphy, who, most likely, was full of ingenious devices for trapping criminals. But Murphy was back in Worcester, fuming at the disappearance of Ted Glenn. By this time he had probably taken the train back to Franklyn.

CHAPTER XXI.

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

AT six o'clock Ted, a little pale and very nervous, rang the bell of Harmon's apartment and was admitted.

Mr. Hertz came out of the private office and inspected him with a gleam of amusement in his dark eyes.

"Welcome to our city," he jeered. "We didn't have any doubt that we should see you again."

"Take a good look," retorted Ted. "You know how I came back."

"Oh, yes. Escorted. Well, the boss wants a few words with you. Sit down. Wait a minute. Any concealed weapons?"

"I don't go in for guns."

"Lots of people do."

Jack Hertz went through the business of tapping Ted's pockets, and then a buzzer sounded.

"That's you," said Hertz. "Go right in."

He opened the door and Ted passed within. Hertz closed it after him. The big criminal was seated at his desk. He was smoking a cigar, and leaned back in his swivel chair with legs crossed.

"Good evening, Glenn," he said with a mirthless smile. "You've been traveling, eh?"

"In a manner of speaking."

"I went to considerable trouble in your case," said Harmon sharply. "You were damned ungrateful."

"I'm sorry you think so."

Ted was standing uncomfortably beside his desk.

"Get around there behind the desk and let me look at you," said Harmon. "You don't look like the rat you are."

Ted flushed but made no reply. "So they picked you up in Worcester," he continued. "What made you select that town?"

"I have a relative there. I expected to find work."

"Fed up on the easy money, eh?" asked Harmon with a grin. "You listen to me, Glenn. I didn't ask you to come into my organization, but having come to work for us you are not allowed to quit. You fell down on a job and got yourself arrested. I should have let them send you away for a stretch. Any notion why I got you off?"

"No," lied Glenn.

Harmon chuckled. "Very little that happens in this town escapes me. I read the will of Tom Mullen and found that he had left you eighty grand in case you performed some notable

public service for the city of New York. Mullen was a patriotic New Yorker, it seems. Now a boob like you could never do anything which would benefit this city and earn you the money. You needed help. I was willing to help you."

"I'm much obliged," said Ted solemnly.

"For a consideration," continued Harmon. "It happens I have a drag with the Mammoth Bank. It occurred to me that I might arrange for you to perform some public service, and induce the bank to consider it important enough to pay you the legacy. That's why I got you out of jail in New Brunswick. Of course if you knew what I had in mind for you, you wouldn't have sneaked out of town. Would you?"

"No-o," said Ted slowly, "I would not."

"I'm going to set you up as president of a society to do away with unsightly billboards. Your society will get an ordinance passed forbidding them. The bank will pay you eighty thousand dollars, and you will pay me one-half, or fifty per cent, for my services."

"And I get the other fifty per cent?" asked Ted naively.

"Why, certainly."

Ted appeared to be considering the proposition. "If I make such a deal I'll have money enough to do anything I please. I would like to go to Europe. You wouldn't expect me to continue in the bootlegging business, I hope. I don't care much for that work."

Harmon smiled benevolently. "It's a good business, but some people don't like it. When you have paid me my commission you can do what you like. You may even go back to Worcester. Do you agree?"

"It looks as if I had no choice," replied Ted.

HARMON drew from a drawer a sheet of paper containing several lines of typing. "Sign this," he commanded.

He pushed it toward Ted and thrust a fountain pen in his hand. Ted tried it and found it without ink. Harmon pushed an ink bottle toward him. Ted jammed the pen into the bottle and deliberately overturned it. A black flood swept over the glass top of the desk and upon the paper. Harmon grasped it in his right hand and pulled it out of danger.

"You clumsy fool," he snarled and dropped the sheet of paper out of range of the ink. To Glenn's delight, he saw two distinct finger-prints on the agreement. And he completely lost his head.

"I've got you!" Ted shouted while he grabbed for the agreement. Harmon snatched it from his hand, and Ted, in his frenzy, drove his right fist at the murderer's jaw.

Harmon pulled back his chin just in time. His lip lifted in a snarl like a wolf's, his eyes blazed, and he touched a button beneath the top of his desk.

From under Ted's feet the floor fell away. He dropped through the opening like a vanishing ghost and was gone. The trap swung back into place.

"Damn!" exclaimed Ollie Harmon. "Now, why did the fool want that agreement? Well, it looks as if the King of England were going to come into some money unless I can find a way to stop it. I'm damned if I understand what was the matter with him. I didn't want to get rid of him yet."

Ted Glenn was sliding down an inclined plane at rapidly increasing speed.

The thing had happened so quickly that he was dazed, and before his brain began to function he was thrown out of the chute upon a flat object which proceeded to elevate him. He lay inert for a few seconds while the thing upon which he was rising passed a doorway and came to a stop. He heard the door open and somebody's footsteps below him, and he realized that he lay on top of an elevator. He should have recognized that fact at once, as there was a steel girder across the top of it, alongside of which he was lying.

The elevator began to descend rapidly. It was dark in the shaft and it passed a square opening some twenty feet down, but no more doorways. Down, down it went for a long distance and finally came to a stop. The passenger opened a steel door, which clanged, and went out. By this time Ted understood that he had escaped by a miracle from a horrible death.

Harmon got rid of undesirable visitors by opening a trap beneath their feet which dropped them down a chute and emptied them into the elevator shaft. The elevator was a private one which was usually kept outside a secret exit from Harmon's apartment, but upon this occasion it had been down to the street level and was on its way up.

It was Glenn's good fortune to drop out of the chute just as the top of the elevator was level with it. Harmon had not intended to murder Ted Glenn that evening, nor had he expected any resistance, and the coast, in consequence, was not clear. Somebody in Harmon's apartment had summoned the car and unwittingly saved Ted's life. Now, how could he get out?

He lit a match and explored the elevator top. His eyes fell upon a steel trapdoor, used by repair men. It

opened readily, and he lowered himself through, dropping upon the floor of the car with a slight jar.

He opened the car door, tried the steel exit into the building. It yielded, and he found himself in a lighted passageway with a door at the end. This door also opened from the inside, and Ted stepped out into an areaway.

A young woman was ahead and turned the corner as he emerged into the passage. There was something familiar about her. Laura Demerest, no doubt. That explained everything. Laura was in Harmon's apartment. She came and went by this elevator. He glanced up. He knew that Harmon was located upon the eighteenth floor. He had escaped a two hundred foot drop down the elevator shaft!

HE was shaken, almost hysterical, and he shook his fist at the top of the building. After that he ran after the young woman. He must talk to Laura. He must find out if her attitude had changed. If she were again on good terms with Harmon there would be no help from her. Any way he had to know.

He hastened to the corner and saw the young woman who had stopped at the curb to hail a taxicab. He bore down upon her and she glanced curiously toward him. Ted stopped short. It was not Laura, but Doll Dean.

"Hello," she said cheerfully. "I know you, don't I? Sure— It's Mr.— er—Glenn."

"Yes, I met you one night with Mooney," he stammered.

"Of course. I want to talk to you. Get in the taxi. You ain't going anywhere in particular, are you?"

"Not exactly."

She stepped into the taxi and with a second's hesitation he followed her.

Miss Dean was looking exceedingly prosperous. She wore several diamond bracelets with a street dress and a string of what appeared to be real pearls was around her snow-white neck. Her rose-colored dress was beautiful, and the light tan coat she wore was trimmed with ermie. She was not as pale as she had been the night he told her about the death of Louis Armstein, and her expression was less hard.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded. "You're all mussed up and you look as though you had seen a ghost."

"I've looked into the face of death," replied Ted unsteadily.

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"Tell me," he demanded, "did you just come down from Harmon's apartment?"

Her eyes flashed angrily. "It's none of your damn business," she exclaimed "What if I did?"

"If you did," he stated, "you saved my life."

"You're a nice kid," she remarked, "only, you're cuckoo."

"If it wasn't for you," he said excitedly, "I would have dropped eighteen stories and would be a mass of pulp at the bottom of that elevator shaft."

A man can't come through such an experience as that which Ted had just survived and be entirely in control of his tongue. He felt that Doll was friendly and he knew that she was responsible for his present existence. He babbled indiscreet confidences in his excitement.

"I've just had an interview with Ollie," he stated. "It was heated and he got rid of me by opening a trap in the floor of his office. I slid down an inclined plane right on top of the eleva-

tor which you had summoned to the Harmon apartment. A fraction of a second later the car would have passed the opening and I would have dropped all the way."

"Oh, the murdering dog!" she breathed. "Oh, the filthy brute! I'll never dare go up there again."

"He didn't kill Armstein that way," Ted reminded her.

"No, he killed Lou like a rat in a trap. Damn him, there ought to be some way to get at him."

Ted was in full possession of his senses now and he watched her narrowly. That hunch he had was right. She had loved Armstein and hated Harmon. Even if she were living with him she hated him and wanted revenge. He had chattered to her like a fool. The chances had been that she would immediately report to Harmon that he had failed in his murderous attempt, but Ted's instinct was correct. She was full of sympathy for the victim and breathing fury against Harmon.

"There is," he declared. "Will you help me?"

DOLL'S mouth tightened with suspicion and her eyes hardened.

"What have you got against Harmon?" she demanded. "What did he ever do to you?"

"Plenty."

"Humph. When I met you that night you were a green kid looking for easy money. I sent you to see Schultz. How do you happen to be in wrong with Ollie to the extent that he drops you down an elevator shaft?"

"He needs me to lay his hands on a lot of money and I refused to accept his proposition," replied Ted.

"Yeah? What does he need you for? You were a counter-jumper out of a job when I met you."

"It's the legacy of Tom Mullen the haberdasher," replied Ted. "Tom left it to me and Harmon wants to grab it."

"Much money?"

"About eighty thousand."

"Well, that might interest him but not much. Look here, when Ollie finds out you're not dead, he'll send a mob after you to fix it so you are. And I don't want him to know that you're riding in a taxi with me. You get out at the next corner."

Ted, desperate, staked all on one throw.

"Miss Dean," he exclaimed, "you said just now you wished there was some way to get him. There is. I have evidence enough to send Harmon to the chair. You can help me."

Doll laughed unpleasantly. "Not me, kid. There is no way of convicting him of anything in New York. He has to be taken for a ride. And try to do that!"

Ted grasped her wrist in his excitement. "Not in New York. I have him for murder in Worcester, Massachusetts."

"Oh, you're a detective. That's your game."

He nodded. "That's my game."

"Stop at the next corner," she cried to the taxi driver. Ted's heart went down into his boots.

"You get out," she commanded. "I live at 1111 Riverside Drive. Apartment 807. It's a big building. You take the elevator to the tenth floor and walk down. You don't have to be announced. Come at nine o'clock. Just open my door and walk in. I don't want to get a knife in me or be strangled in my sleep, but if there is anything I can do and be safe— Get out, now."

She threw open the taxi door and he leaped contentedly to the sidewalk. The

taxi drove on. At the next block Doll dismissed it and went into a drug store. She came out five minutes later to take another taxi.

CHAPTER XXII.

BLACKJACKS OUT!

AS Ted hesitated on the corner a taxi drew up a dozen yards below him and a passenger alighted. It was seven o'clock, high time for dinner, but Ted was too excited to be hungry. Nevertheless, he had two hours to kill before his interview with Doll Dean. He was standing outside a lunchroom, and turned toward it just as a heavy hand landed upon his shoulder and a gruff voice said:

"I want you."

His knees buckled and his heart almost stopped beating. Police or gangsters? He turned and emitted a sigh of relief and thankfulness for he looked into the rugged countenance of ex-Sergeant Dennis Murphy.

"G-good Lord," Ted ejaculated. "Where did you come from? How did you get here?"

"Gave me the slip in Worcester, eh?" chuckled Murphy. "Thought you could kid an old man, eh? I didn't spend thirty years on the Worcester police force for nothing, Mr. Glenn."

Ted laughed joyfully. "Well, I don't know how you found me, but I certainly am glad to see you. Sergeant, it wasn't my fault I didn't keep our appointment this morning."

He thrust out his hand and Murphy grasped it heartily. "I had an idea that you didn't break the date on purpose. Had your dinner?"

"Just going into that lunchroom."

"You and me both," declared the old policeman.

They entered the one-arm joint, loaded trays at the counter and carried them to an unoccupied corner. Ted was conscious of a tremendous feeling of gratitude toward the old pensioner of the Worcester police department who had turned up so unexpectedly and so opportunely.

"I'd like very much to know how you found me," he asserted.

"Well," said Murphy after a huge swallow of hot coffee, "I landed at your Worcester hotel about a quarter after ten. They told me you checked out. I knew you had no intention of checking out so I asked a few questions. I found out that you came downstairs with a man the clerk didn't know. He described him and the description didn't sound good to me. I figured that this man Harmon might have got wind that you were in Worcester digging into his dead dark past and had sent a boy over to take you away from there.

"I traced the two of you to the train and found out that you bought tickets to New York. I dug into the old sock for the price of a ticket and came over on the noon train. Landed at the Grand Central. Hadn't been in New York for twenty-five years. Say, that's quite a grand station they put up there."

"Never mind the station, please!"

"Well, New York is a pretty big place and I didn't know where you could be located, but you mentioned this Oliver Harmon and the thought struck me that if it was Harmon who sent a feller to bring you to New York, he probably wanted to see you himself and you might go to his house. I looked him up in the directory and found out that a lawyer named Oliver Harmon lived on East Seventy — Street. I took a taxi over there be-

cause it was too late for him to be at his office.

"I snooped around the apartment house and looked over the lay of the land, and I was thinking about making some inquiries inside when up comes a taxi and who gets out but you. I was on the other side of the street, and you got into the building and into an elevator before I could catch up with you. So I went out and took up a position in a doorway on the other side of the street again. I supposed you'd come out sometime."

"By George, that was clever," exclaimed Ted. "I'll never sneer at a small town detective again."

"Worcester is a big city," declared Murphy. "Not as big as New York, but just the same it isn't no small town."

"You bet it isn't. Then what?"

"Well, twenty minutes or half an hour went by and I saw a woman come out of an alleyway at the east side of the apartment building. Pretty soon you come out of the alley and start talking to the gal. I crossed the street to grab you when you got through with the young woman, but you got into a taxi with her. So I just stopped another taxi and told the driver to keep your machine in sight. Simple enough, wasn't it?"

"Oh, very," smiled Ted. "I supposed you would find that I had left town and you would have gone back to Franklyn cursing me."

"**S**AY, after what you told me about this Harmon, I wasn't going to let the thing drop. I would have come over and got him myself if I never picked you up again. They used to call me Bulldog Murphy when I was in active service."

"All right, sergeant," said Ted.

"You proved that you are as good a sleuth as you ever were. Now I'm going to tell you everything from the beginning and take you into partnership with me. You have no notion what we are up against, and it's time you found out."

Ted started his story with the death of Tom Mullen and his peculiar bequest and carried it with occasional interruptions up to the moment when he got out of Doll Dean's taxi.

Murphy lit a cigar and sat in silence for several minutes after he had finished.

"You were a sap to pull that trick in his own office," he chided. "Dumbest play I ever heard of. How do you know that the finger-prints were on the same hand as those we have, or were the same fingers?"

"I saw the prints and I went crazy, I guess," admitted Ted.

"I went to headquarters before I called for you," Murphy informed him, "and got copies of the prints. The boys razed me for digging up that ancient case, but they'll laugh on the other side of their mouths when I march this murderer into headquarters. Glenn, you are the luckiest stiff I ever heard of. If I read about a fellow sliding out of a hole at the exact minute when an elevator was coming up the shaft and was on the level with it, I wouldn't believe it."

"If that hadn't happened, I wouldn't be here."

"Well, you got to admit you're covered with horseshoes."

"Oh, I do."

"This feller Harmon must be a wonder," commented Murphy. "Just presses a button and down they go, eighteen stories. I've heard of these master crooks, but I never took any stock in it. We never had 'em in Wor-

cester. For that matter, these organized gangs are all modern developments. You say he is mixed up in politics as well as bootlegging and assorted crimes?"

"He is so powerful that nothing can be done to him here. I told you what the officer said when he found the body of Louis Armstein. He said that Armstein's enemies had threatened to take him on Broadway in daylight, and they had kept their word. He said he had an accurate notion of who ordered the killing, but that was all the good it would do him."

Murphy nodded. "I see my finish if I went down to police headquarters and asked for assistance. We've got to do this job alone, young fellow."

Ted nodded. "And no time to be lost. Harmon, no doubt, has already learned that my body isn't lying at the bottom of his elevator shaft. Some of his gunmen will run me down within twenty-four hours."

"If we could lay our hands on him, knock him on the head and chuck him in the bottom of an automobile we could have him in Connecticut in an hour. From what you told me about him I'm willing to gamble that he killed Mary Green. Get him into Massachusetts, chuck him into jail and finger-print him at our leisure. That's the ticket."

Ted laughed without amusement. "It is highly unlikely that Harmon moves around without plenty of protection."

"I know that. Armored cars, bullet-proof glass, and guards—they call 'em torpedoes, I understand—ahead and behind. I'm just talking."

"It's exceedingly likely that it will cost you your life if we persist, Murphy. You aren't known by the gangsters yet. Go back to Franklyn. If

I can't get any aid from Doll Dean, and if I'm still alive by midnight, I think I'll try to get out of town myself."

"You and me are going to get this guy," said Murphy confidently. "Do you think you can trust this dame? She's kept by Harmon, isn't she?"

"I don't know whether I can trust her or not," said Ted. "She might have phoned Harmon that I'll call on her at nine o'clock and I may be shot down in the hallway of her apartment house. I've got to take a chance."

"I'LL be with you, boy. They used to say I could smell a crook farther than I could see him. If there are any gangsters laying around outside this apartment I'll spot them."

"Murphy, you don't know these modern gangsters. They don't hesitate to shoot. You could pull a gun on one and he would not hesitate to fire. He would assume that you thought you had him cowed and wouldn't shoot first."

"I'll go into the building first and snoop around," replied Murphy. "They ain't looking for me. If I see anything suspicious I'll come out and tip you off. In that case we'll drop the Dean woman and go to call on the green-eyed red-head. You're wrong in thinking she wouldn't go through. Jealous red-headed janes are poison. I remember back in 1903—"

"The point is that we have to have immediate action, and Laura Demerest is unable to do anything for us. Doll Dean is Harmon's new girl."

"How old a man in this Harmon?" asked Murphy, lifting his voice in his eagerness.

"Sssh," warned Ted. "You can't use his name like that in this town."

"Oh, nobody could hear me."

"I don't know," replied Glenn. "That fellow over there has been acting as if he would like to know what we're talking about, and he pricked up his ears just now."

Murphy looked cautiously to the right of him. A nondescript young fellow was getting to his feet about five or six yards distant. He sauntered indifferently out of the place. Ted saw him pay his check at the cashier's desk and go through the exit.

"He didn't hear me," Murphy asserted. "Besides, there are scores of Harmons in New York. I saw half a page in the telephone book."

"Well, he's middle-aged, average height, thin and sharp-looking. Black hair and curious eyes, sort of gray. I can't exactly describe him. Clean shaved, very snappy dresser."

"Business man type?"

"Why, yes, I guess so."

"You haven't told me much. Now, what do you expect to get from this Dean woman?"

"That's what I want to ask you. I'm gambling that she hates Harmon so much she will be willing to help us if it's safe. I thought that she might manage to get his finger-prints where we couldn't."

"He's her meal ticket, you say?"

"She admitted it."

"Well," said the old detective, "women are funny. She might be willing to hand over a live one for the sake of a dead one. I've known 'em to pitch away all their prospects for no reason at all. But she's a crook and she hasn't much conscience when she would take up with the man who killed her old sweetheart. You were fool enough to confess to her that Harmon wanted you murdered. You can't tell how the cat will jump, just as you said. You're only a young feller and you

might save your skin by getting out of New York. I don't advise you to take this chance."

"I'm taking it," said Ted doggedly.

"All right. There are lots of ways she could get his finger-prints if he comes to her apartment. Leave a little oil on a dresser top. Butter the edge of a newspaper and get him to take hold of it. It's a hot night; I'm sweating in this place. He might leave his finger-prints on a glass-topped table, or almost anywhere. Ask her to let me into the apartment just after he's been there and I bet I'll find them."

"Suppose she is afraid to do that?"

"Then get her to ask him to ride her out to a road house across the Connecticut line and let us know where they go. I don't suppose he takes his bodyguard when he goes joy-riding with his girl."

"I wouldn't be surprised if he did, but Doll would know that."

"It's half past eight," said Murphy. "It's roasting in here. Let's get out."

THEY left the lunch room and stopped outside on the sidewalk.

"How far away does she live?" asked the sergeant.

"Way up on Riverside Drive."

"Then walk down to the river. I haven't seen the view from there for a quarter of a century. I bet it has changed a lot."

They turned from Broadway down West Ninety-First Street and had proceeded but half a block when Murphy chuckled.

"Lad," he said, "we're being followed. It's the bozo who was in the lunch room. I bet I talked too loud at that. Don't look back. I got a squint of him as he passed under a lamp-post back there."

"Is he alone?"

"Looks like it."

Ted looked alarmed. "What are we going to do?"

"The first dark doorway we come to, I'll turn in. You shake hands with me and walk on."

Like most side streets leading to the Hudson the thoroughfare was dimly lighted and at the moment it was deserted. Ted stopped at a doorway selected by Murphy and went through the pantomime of saying good-by. Murphy passed into the long narrow lobby of a small apartment house and moved out of view from the entrance.

The shadow slunk along, hesitated, and decided to follow the man who was still in sight since he had located the stopping-place of the other. He continued on after Ted.

A moment later Murphy emerged and walked rapidly after the trailer. The man heard footsteps, glanced back and recognized the older of the pair he was following. He slowed up and in a few rods Murphy came abreast of him on his left side. What followed occurred faster than it takes to tell it. The old man's right hand was lifted and a blackjack crashed against the side of the shadow's head. The fellow crumpled, Murphy caught him as he collapsed, and dropped him in the basement entrance of an old-fashioned brownstone house.

The blackjack went back into Murphy's hip pocket and he walked briskly along, whistling cheerfully, in pursuit of Ted, who was obeying instructions by strolling on, oblivious of the melodrama in his rear.

Dennis caught up with Ted at the corner of Riverside Drive.

"Where is he?" asked Glenn.

"He ain't bothering about us any more," replied Murphy. "There ain't anybody so unsuspecting as a shadow.

His eyes are fixed on the person he is trailing and he don't know what's going on behind him. I slugged him as I passed by and he won't be thinking about anything for ten minutes."

"Good Lord," exclaimed Ted, "you shouldn't have done that. You'll get into trouble, Murphy."

"Bah! That kind don't go running to the cops. He's some cheap crook."

"You haven't got this town yet, sergeant. This isn't Worcester. That man belongs to one of Harmon's gangs and Harmon can get anything he wants in New York."

"Well, he don't know what struck him. I'm an old man, but I can hit hard and there's half a pound of lead in that old blackjack of mine. I took it from a hold-up man named Billy Minken about twenty years ago."

"Let's take a taxi and get away from this neighborhood," urged Ted. "You certainly think quickly and act more quickly."

"Sixty-nine my next birthday," boasted Murphy. "But maybe we had better take a taxi."

They gave an address several doors above the apartment house in which Doll Dean resided and were whisked up there in a few minutes. Ted looked at his watch. It was quarter to nine.

"I'll go in first and have a look about the lobby," said Murphy. "If there are any crooks lying round there, I'll spot them."

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEATH-TRAP.

WITH considerable trepidation Ted awaited his return. As it approached the zero hour, his courage oozed out of him. As Murphy had stated, it was an even chance

whether Doll received him in a friendly spirit or lured him into a trap.

What an absurdly unfair contest it was! On one side the criminal boss of New York with thousands of unscrupulous and desperate men under his command, on the other a youth of twenty-four and an elderly detective who for years had been on the pension list of a smaller city's police department.

Freehold and Worcester against New York!

In five or six minutes Murphy came out of the apartment house entrance.

"Not so good," Murphy reported. "The doorman is an ex-bartender by the look of him and the telephone operator looks like a dip. The bird on the elevator resembles my idea of a gangster. Watch your step, young fellow. How long do you think you'll be?"

"I don't know. Maybe a few minutes, perhaps an hour."

"What's the number of the woman's apartment?"

"Eight hundred seven. It's on the eighth floor. My instructions are to take the elevator to the tenth floor and walk down."

"Well, good luck. Don't tell her too much, and if things don't look right, break out quick. I'll be 'round somewhere."

They shook hands and Ted walked boldly into the building. As he had repaired the ravages of his slide down the chute, he was presentable in appearance and attracted no apparent attention. He entered the elevator and observed that the attendant was dark, low-browed and furtive. Quite possibly a gangster placed here by Harmon to keep an eye on Doll Dean.

"Tenth floor," he said to the man, who nodded, and a few seconds later threw open the door at the tenth story.

The car shot down again immediately. Ted had some trouble finding the staircase which was placed unobtrusively behind an unmarked steel door.

He descended two flights. As he started to open the staircase door he heard the elevator come to a stop at the eighth floor. Somebody got out and walked along the corridor. Ted waited until he heard an apartment door slam and then emerged. Number 807 was at the end of the corridor. There was a bracket for a nameplate on the door, but Miss Dean had omitted to put her name there. He tried the door-knob softly, pushed, and the door yielded. He stepped into a dark hallway and his breath came fast.

The light was suddenly turned on in the hall and he blinked at the unexpected illumination. A door ahead of him, which was ajar, opened to disclose Doll Dean.

"It's all right. Come on in," she invited.

She had not changed her costume and she had not bothered to repair her make-up. He observed that her eyes were red as though she had been weeping. She stepped back to permit him to enter.

The drawing-room had been dark and she threw on the light. The contrast between the dingy apartment in which he had first encountered Doll and the splendor in which she now lived did not fail to impress him though he had more important matters to consider.

"Glad to see you're still alive," she said with a significant smile. "You're safe here for a little while, I guess. I've let the maid go out to a picture show. She is a spy on me, of course. Ollie's like that."

"I wasn't sure that you hadn't phoned him that I had escaped from

the elevator shaft and might be found here at nine o'clock," he said boldly.

DOLL laughed. "You're cool, all right. I thought of it. It would establish me stronger with Ollie. But I thought I'd hear your proposition first. Sit down. Want a drink?"

"I should say not," he exclaimed. "I'm not in a sociable mood exactly." "Nor me."

She seated herself on a divan close to his chair. She was a pretty thing, he thought, and she didn't seem so hard-boiled as upon the occasion of their first meeting. Doll met his gaze with one much more intent.

"You puzzle me," she declared. "You must be what they call a psychologist. You knew that I came down in the elevator from Harmon's apartment and that meant I was pretty close to him. It seemed like a boob play to tell me that he had just tried to kill you. You'd only met me once. How did you know I'd give you a break?"

"I knew that you were suffering that night when I was telling you how Armstein died," he said simply. "I didn't think you were the kind of girl who would become intimate with his murderer if you didn't have some game on."

She wrinkled her white brow. "You're smarter than Ollie, then," she replied. "You'd suppose he would figure I was bad medicine. The only weakness he's got is his conceit. He thinks I'm crazy about him and it tickled him to kill Louis and get his girl."

"I'll tell you the facts," said Ted eagerly. "Tom Mullen, the haberdasher, was a good friend of mine. He believed that Harmon was responsible for his being shot though the bullets came from Armstein's gun. I prom-

ised him I would try to bring Harmon to book for some of his crimes. Of course it was a tall order."

"You were crazy," she exclaimed. "So that's why you were playing around with that nitwit Mooney, and why you told me you were looking for soft money and didn't care how you got it. You wanted to get close to Ollie."

Ted nodded.

"How did he get on to you?" she demanded.

"I don't know. He framed my arrest on a bootlegging truck and then got me out of jail. He supposed I was entirely in his power, but I crossed him by leaving town."

"You found out what you were up against and quit, eh?"

"Not exactly. I had information of a murder that he committed ten years ago in Massachusetts and I went there to get evidence. Early this morning one of his men found me and brought me back to New York at the point of a gun. I was told to meet Harmon at six o'clock. We had words, and he dropped me down the chute."

"So there was one time when he did his own personal killing," she exclaimed. "I suppose he knew what you were after and that's why he made you jump without a parachute."

"No, we had words about another matter. He wanted to make me the head of a crooked association and I refused."

"You've got a good 'front' and he could use you in his business. Well, when a con man and a bootlegger refuses to do something because it's crooked, I can understand how Ollie felt annoyed," she said with a hard laugh. "Tell me about this crime in Massachusetts."

"There was a miserly old lady named Mary Green who kept seventy-

five thousand dollars in bank notes hidden in her mattress. He heard about it through Shopiro, who had transacted some legal business for her, so he went over to Worcester and strangled her to death."

"And this was ten years ago! He doesn't have to make personal calls now," she jeered. "You'll never pin that on him. Ollie will go out with his boots on. If you ever get near him again, Glenn, gun him. Claim self-defense. There isn't a man so hated in New York. Once he's cold, nobody will lift a finger to revenge him. You'd be acquitted by any jury because all his crimes will come out then."

"No," said Ted. "I couldn't commit a murder."

"You're a fool! How long do you suppose you'll live if you don't get him first? I'll tell you something. I'm a one-man woman and Louis was my man. I swore I'd get even with Harmon and I schemed to meet him and vamp him. I was going to stick a knife in him the first chance I got and I didn't care what they did to me afterward. Well, I've had plenty of chances, but I haven't the nerve. I'm yellow, I guess. He's got some kind of influence I can't explain. I'm putty when I'm with him. All I've had nerve enough to do is to gold-dig him and he's so rich that doesn't hurt him."

"IF I can get him into Massachusetts, I can send him to the chair," said Ted confidently. "I am positive he can't rule the courts in that State."

"Like heck you can. He's the cleverest lawyer in America and they've never electrocuted a millionaire yet. I'm going to give you a chance to stand face to face with Ollie and let you do what I'm afraid to do. Got a gun?"

"No," he replied. "I told you I wouldn't do that."

"Well, he won't hesitate. Be a man, can't you?"

"Can you get him into Connecticut, say, to a roadhouse?"

"Sure, but he'll send a car ahead of us full of gangsters and another will follow. I don't care what evidence you've got, kid, you haven't a Chinaman's chance."

"Well, will you do this? All I need are the finger-prints of his right hand, especially the thumb and first and second fingers. Will you get them for me?"

She looked alarmed. "What good would they do?"

"Because the Worcester police have the prints of the murderer of Mary Green."

"All right. Suppose I get them. You can't prove they are his and you can't arrest him. Don't you know yet that Harmon runs this town?"

"Get the prints and I'll have him taken to Massachusetts."

Doll laughed harshly. "See any green in my eyes? Suppose you brought him to trial over there? He'd get off and he'd find out how you got the finger-prints and he'd have me cut to pieces. I hate him as much as I ever did, but I'm afraid to die. Count me out of that scheme, mister. What time is it?"

Ted looked at his watch. "It's nine thirty-five."

"Wait a minute." She rose and left the room. She returned a moment later carrying something shiny in her hand. It was a small revolver and she handed it to Ted.

"It's you or him," Doll said tersely.

"I told you I couldn't—"

"You've got to. I can't and you must. In five minutes he is coming

into this room. You hide behind those portières and, when you get him in line, shoot and shoot straight. If you let him have a glimpse of you, it's the end of you, and me too, I expect."

"I'll get out of here."

"You can't," she said triumphantly. "I planned this when I knew you were coming. I phoned Ollie to arrive at a quarter to ten. Two or three of his men are downstairs now. The elevator man is one of his gang and you'll never get out of this building alive."

"I won't anyway," he said despairingly. "You led me into a trap."

"Bah," she cried furiously. "You chicken-livered pup, I'm giving you a break! Look. There's a fire escape outside the window and three floors

down is a vacant apartment with the window unlocked. I have a key and I unlocked the window myself an hour ago. You can open the door from the inside and go down the stairs. When the shot is heard the whole gang will pile into the elevator and the coast will be clear. When they find he is dead, they'll forget all about you."

"No," said Ted. "I'll kill no man in cold blood."

"Then kill him in hot blood, you fool! Think what he tried to do to you."

They heard the elevator stop at the floor and quick steps in the hallway. Doll thrust the weapon in his nerveless fingers and pushed him toward the portières. A key clicked in the lock.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



Death Valley's Freak Rain

DEATH VALLEY, that forbidding, mysterious desert, one hundred and fifty miles long and from ten to thirty-five miles wide, lying between California and Nevada, probably the hottest and most dreaded region of the United States, has recently experienced the strangest prank of nature in its history. During the month of May of this year, rain actually fell there for nineteen consecutive days, a phenomenon never duplicated in the memory of any living person.

As soon as word of this freak rain circulated throughout the West, people braved the inconveniences of desert travel and journeyed to this lonely region to behold a spectacle that probably will never be seen again: Death Valley abloom, a riotous mass of color where before was only barrenness and desolation.

Millions of plant seeds, presumably lying dormant for years in the hot sands, when moistened by the rains suddenly burst into life, and in a short time the torrid waste became a garden of poppies, buttercups, Indian paintbrushes, and purple sage, a garden that bloomed until the rays of the sun absorbed the moisture and shriveled them slowly to dust. The valley reverted to its former type, a great searing caldron as terrifying as the name it bears.

Gerald FitzGerald.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

A. MERRITT

Author of "*The Ship of Ishtar*," "*Seven Footprints to Satan*," "*The Face in the Abyss*," "*The Snake Mother*," etc.

THE A stands for Abraham. It happened this way. The family on both sides were Quakers. Whenever anybody was born the Bible was taken down and the chapter of "Begats" consulted. His mother's mother headed a revolt and named her children Ida, Phoebe, Ella and Philip—she liked the Greeks. She got away with it by sheer force of character, but when Ida's son was born the conservatives on both sides surged in. As a result the helpless infant was named Abraham after his grandfather. He was lucky, because that was a compromise between Job and Hezekiah.

General Wesley Merritt was his grand-uncle and Fenimore Cooper only a little farther back in his family tree. After having saddled him with the name of Abraham, the family thought he ought to be a lawyer. Why not? Some day he might be President. Abraham Lincoln had the same number of letters in his name as Abraham Merritt. What could be more logical?

So after going through Philadelphia High, he matriculated for the University of Pennsylvania law school. Almost immediately thereafter his whole family went broke. There was nothing to do about it, so he did it. He went into the newspaper game at the tender age of eighteen. In those days writing was paid for at the rate of five dollars a column, and twenty dollars a week was affluence. Two star reporters took him in hand and taught him the art of the inter-written story—that is, one the harassed copy reader could not cut. This was not altruism on their part, because the more money he could make the more they could borrow. He served a little over a year of this peonage, but has never regretted the cost of the training.

Newspapers were newspapers in those days, and politics were politics. It happened he saw one day something that made it awkward to have him within reach of the witness stand. The result was that he spent a happy year at no expense to himself wandering around Central America, poking into ruins, getting in and out of tight places and acquiring a taste for archeology. Also a rather unusual cargo of Mayan, Aztec and, later, Incan legends and the kind of history not

taught in the schools. During that time he gained a curious knowledge of Indian customs, religious ceremonies that would have made his Quaker ancestors' hair stand on end, and an equally intimate knowledge of the interiors of palaces, wine shops, haciendas, huts, the jungle and once or twice the *cabo* or jail.

Returning reluctantly north, he resumed his newspaper fetters, and became immersed in a succession of murder mysteries, suicides, coal strikes, minor and major catastrophes and executions.

He unfortunately developed a talent for writing up these latter so vividly that he was always assigned to them. He wrote them vividly because he loathed them. His procedure was always the same. He would attend the ceremony strongly fortified.

He would return and write the story, resign with dignity and at once finish his fortification with a complete plasterization. He would return in a couple of days with the wound in his soul scarred over, and that would be all of that till the next hanging.

Between times he would seek relief from this dark life of crime and catastrophe by jaunts back to the jungle, and in study of science, of color and of music.

After a few years of this he went to New York, becoming the assistant of Morrill Goddard, editor of the *American Weekly*, of the Hearst Sunday newspapers, whom A. Merritt considers the greatest newspaper editor in the world and to whom he believes he owes a debt of gratitude for patient training he can never repay.

As for the rest, he is somewhat of an authority upon folk-lore and mythology, archeology, Central and South American history and customs, a fair astronomer and a good botanist, with a smattering of other sciences. He has made an intensive study of ancient sorcery, medieval magic and witchcraft, both past and modern.

He dislikes all violent exercise, including bridge, and never walks if he can ride. He keeps bees.

He writes slowly, and primarily to please himself—which is largely why he writes so little. And whenever he finishes a book he is profoundly depressed for a time because it is no better.





Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



YES, ARGOSY's life span has covered a remarkable age of change and development, and, as Mr. Jones remarks, who knows what the next fifty years will bring forth? Who knows how many of our present-day fantastic stories will be tame every-day matters in 1980?

San Jose, Cal.

In looking over the ARGOSY I noticed I have taken it almost thirty-five years and in all that time I have only missed one copy. But what a change has taken place in all these years! What will it be in the next fifty years? Time only will tell. I think and always will think ARGOSY is the best and only book published.

L. E. JONES.

THEODORE ROSCOE lists another admirer:

No. Adams, Mass.

I have only read the ARGOSY for about a year. It is a great magazine. For variety it cannot be beat by any other magazine anywhere near its cost.

My favorite author is Theodore Roscoe, whose stories of the Foreign Legion are masterpieces. I like all the other kinds of stories, except the impossible ones. However, a great number of people like them, so I suppose they are all right.

Many thanks to Theodore Roscoe for the stories he has written.

EDMUND LAWRENCE.

ANOTHER call for back numbers. Write direct to Mr. Keuhl:

Holstein, Iowa.

Just a few words of praise for the authors who make ARGOSY what it is. "Dead Line" promises to be one of the best stories J. Allan Dunn has written so far. F. V. W. Mason's Foreign Legion stories are the best in that class. Hugh Pendexter is outstanding with the historical novels. I prefer historical, underworld, mystery, detective, Western and impossible in the order named.

Paul Stahr gets a lot of new readers for you with his dandy covers.

I regret that I had to miss so many good

stories in years gone by, and I wonder if some of the readers who have ARGOSIES dated 1925 and before would write to me.

EDWARD KEUHL.

"CUT out the serials," suggests this busy reader. Hm—we wonder what the other readers would think of that?

West Palm Beach, Fla.

For the first time in the years I have been reading ARGOSY I am sending in my choice of stories. I haven't the time to follow up the continued stories. However, I like the short stories and believe if you would cut out all except one or two of the continued stories and insert short ones instead that you would add to the list of your subscribers. I appreciate stories by J. Allan Dunn, author of "The Phantom Mine."

CHARLES M. ARTHUR.

HERE are some back numbers that may find a purchaser:

Tampa, Fla.

I wish to say that I have received so many letters from ARGOSY readers, inquiring about some old ARGOSIES that I have on hand and whether I desired to sell them or not. Now I have about five hundred, but I only wish to sell those numbers that I have duplicates of. In other words, I have duplicates of those issues beginning June 2, 1928, up to the present date, these numbers are for sale. The best offer gets them.

Those ARGOSY readers that wish these numbers write to 5506 Central Ave., Tampa, Fla.

Hoping that you will publish this letter, I remain,

R. GABE AYALA, Jr.

THIS reader is all set for A. Merritt's "The Snake Mother":

Dayton, Ky.

Now that we have received the glad news that Mr. A. Merritt is returning to the ARGOSY, I just cannot help but write to you, Mr. Editor, and thank you and Mr. A. Merritt; he is the best writer in America to-day—every story is a masterpiece. You can charge us fifty cents each for the ARGOSY when you publish Mr. Merritt's

sequel to "The Face in the Abyss." I hope this story, "The Face in the Abyss," and "The Snake Mother" will be published in book form. Every copy they publish will be sold.

I have been taking the ARGOSY some seven or eight years, and can truthfully say it is the very best magazine in the world. You have some more very good writers. Fred MacIsaac is good. "The Man of Gold" was fine, E. S. Gardner's Whispering Tales are wonderful, Theodore Roscoe's stories are good. Bedford-Jones is very good; I enjoyed his *John Solomon* stories.

Frank L. Packard I would like to hear from. We never have serials about the American Revolution. I sure enjoy historical novels.

W. B. BOEHKE.

NOW for a little get-together on favorite authors and stories:

I want to offer you my amused congratulations. Two other magazines with which you are no doubt familiar claimed to have secured the promise of A. Merritt to write for them the sequel to "The Face in the Abyss." ARGOSY made no boasts concerning "The Snake Mother," but a few weeks ago an insignificant little announcement appeared forecasting the date of its arrival—in ARGOSY. I am glad that you are capable of getting fine stories without any premature gab.

Of course, I read your "Argonotes" regularly, and have observed that the old-timers get together there and list the stories of past years which have been decided favorites with them. Now I have read the ARGOSY in all its various evolutions for at least eight years, and have read copies as far back as 1910 which I borrowed from the files of a friend and fellow-reader. Therefore I apparently have more than a thousand stories to my credit—or more nearly a dozen times that number. Naturally I have forgotten innumerable novels, but others have clung to my memory and will always do so. With your kind indulgence, I will list them as one veteran to another.

At first I was interested solely in unusual stories unduplicated elsewhere, and read all those as rapidly as possible. I remember "The Blind Spot," "The Metal Monster," "The Rebel Soul," "After a Million Years," "Between Worlds," "Darkness and Dawn Trilogy," "The Empire in the Air," "The Sea Demons," "Draft of Eternity," "Into the Infinite," and all of Burroughs's and Cummings's tales. There were many other weird and improbable stories, all of them very intriguing. Austin Hall was from the very first my favorite author until the appearance of A. Merritt. Hall's "The Blind Spot," which he wrote in collaboration with the unfortunate Homer Eon Flint, was the greatest weird story I ever read except "The Moon Pool." But then,

all of Hall's were good. His "The Rebel Soul," and "Into the Infinite," were unsurpassable.

Edgar Franklin's tales of an old guy named *Captain Velvet* were interesting—I recall "Captain Velvet's Gamble." Lately he has begun writing horrible stories in which his heroes are always in trouble, and I invariably get so excited and vexed I almost scream. Why can't he recall *Captain Velvet* and be popular again?

I read the original "Peter the Brazen." Of course, *John Solomon* was good then, too. Some other old time characters that have gone beyond were—well, who were they? Some whistling detective, a cockney detective (not *Solomon*), and a cowboy—*Hopalong*.

At the present I am wild about Kline, Worts, MacIsaac, and 's'all. Kline's stories are very good. Worts is especially good in his South Sea stories and light humorous things. Most favorably do I remember his "Once a Gentleman," "You're Under Arrest," "Peter the Brazen," "Gee, But It's Great to Be a Hero!" and "The Scandal on Skeleton Key." MacIsaac shone in "The Mental Marvel," "Soft Money," and "The Man of Gold."

FRED W. FISCHER, JR.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

I have been a reader of your magazine for two years and hope to read it many more. My favorite authors are W. Wirt, H. Bedford-Jones, Fred MacIsaac, Ralph R. Perry, Otis Adelbert Kline, and Erle Stanley Gardner. Keep up the good work and don't change the ARGOSY one bit.

BENJAMIN NAGELBUSH.

New York, N. Y.

I wish to congratulate you on your fine magazine. I bought my first ARGOSY about one year ago upon the recommendation of two of my friends. I became so interested in your magazine that my interest caused two other friends to start buying it.

Some of my favorite stories are: "The Radio Menace," "The Radio Gun-Runners," "Moving Day," all *Bill* and *Jim* stories, *Hazeltine* stories, *Peter the Brazen*, *Jimmie Cordie*, and *Bellow Bill*. My favorite authors are Fred MacIsaac, Thompson, Kline, Cummings, Tuttle, Perry, Grinstead and Harold de Polo; in fact, I like all your authors. I have never yet found a story I did not like. Wishing you every success, and thanking you in advance for the drawing, I remain,

JACK BRENNAN.

Brookhaven, Miss.

I am an ARGOSY reader and would like to tell you how well I like your magazine. I think it is the best magazine on the American market, regardless of price. All the stories are the best of their kind—I have read enough different maga-

zines to know. Don't let the kickers worry you, but if they get to pestering you too much just let me know and I will come up and help you choke some of them. I would like to do it anyway. They just don't know a good magazine when they see it.

Please give F. V. W. Mason my best regards for the story, "The Renegade Caïd." That was the best story of the Foreign Legion that I ever feasted my eyes on. Please give him a paid vacation, for he deserves it for such a vivid, breath taking novelette.

Tell Paul Stahr that his pictures are a sight for sore optics. He makes the characters real from which he takes the picture each time. Slip him an extra grand or two—he deserves it.

A few of my favorite stories are: Pinkerton's "The Ghost of Locked Inlet," Farley's "The Radio Menace," Rouse's "By the Sword," Wheeler-Nicholson's "The Baldassare Ruby" and "The Czarina's Pearls," Gardner's "A Year in a Day," Kline's "The Prince of Peril," MacIsaac's "The Man of Gold," Dunn's "Ocean Outlaws," Bedford-Jones's "The Emergency Mate," and Grinstead's "The Crimson Trail."

These are not the only stories I like, for I have not as yet found a story in ARGOSY that I didn't like.

Let the ARGOSY keep sailing on—and on—and on.

J. DENMAN GRIFFIN.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____

10-25



Looking Ahead!

J. ALLAN DUNN

sails again for the South Seas in a thrilling two-part story

Cubes of Chance

ANTHONY M. RUD

charts a course over the trackless desert in a complete novelette

Cactus Cache

W. WIRT

will be on hand with another top-speed short story of the U. S. Secret Service

Outsmarted

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF NOVEMBER 1st

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December 6th Classified Forms Close October 29th

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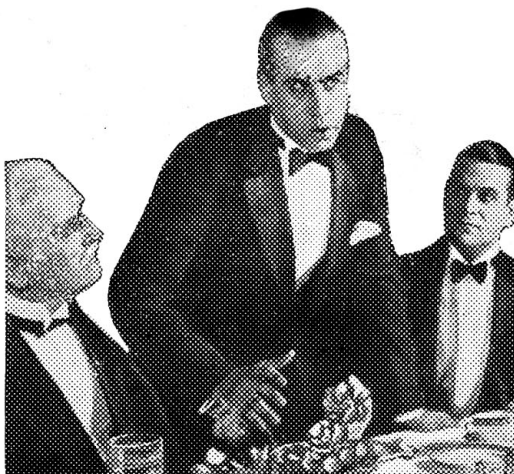
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Speechless ...When A Few Words Would Have Made Me

**But Now I Can Face the Largest Audience
Without A Trace of Stage Fright!**

THIS annual banquet of our Association—the largest men in the industry present—and without warning the Chairman called on me to speak—and my mind went blank! I half rose, bowed awkwardly and mumbled, "I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me today," and dropped back in my chair.

Speechless—when a few words would have made me! If I could have made a simple little speech—giving my opinion of trade conditions in a concise, witty, interesting way, I know I would have been made for life! And then a week later like magic I discovered how to overcome my stage fright. With the aid of a splendid new home study method I rapidly developed the ability to face giant audiences—without a trace of stage fright.

There is no trick, no mystery about becoming a powerful and convincing speaker—a brilliant, easy, fluent conversationalist. You, too, can conquer timidity, stage fright, self-consciousness and bashfulness. Now, through an amazing new home study training you can quickly shape yourself into an outstanding influential speaker.

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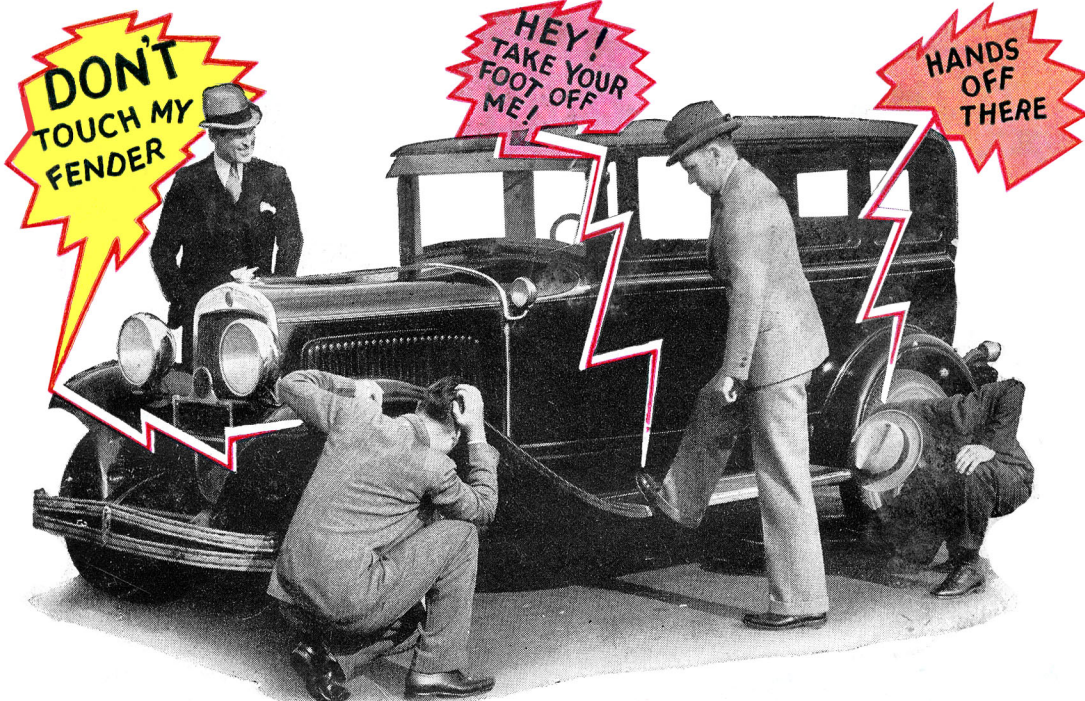
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Uncanny Invention Startles Motorists Protects Your Car From Thieves, Puzzles Your Friends!

Here is something incredibly new and revolutionary. More mysterious than anything since the first discoveries of radio! As uncanny as electricity itself! Actually more

useful and valuable than the self-starter on your car! As easily controlled as your headlights! Inexpensive! No wonder it has turned the motor world topsy-turvy overnight!

Pays Agent Record Earnings Of \$138 In A Day!

IMAGINE having a car that no sneak thief can tamper with! No joy-rider can steal! No friend can touch without being warned to keep away! Then think of offering this uncanny electrical device to other motorists at a price scarcely greater than the cost of a new radio tube!

In the above few words you have the reason why G. Oliver of Illinois set a profit record of \$138 in a single day. James Harper of London, England, cables, "Devil-Dogs received, ship immediately three hundred, cable best terms for sales concession, Great Britain." A. Kar-ratti of Hawaii writes, "Have equipped my car with Devil-Dog and am creating a sensation." Ernest Flom, No. Dakota, states, "The Police force praise it highly." Richard Jacques, Canada, writes, "Have sold one for Police armoured car and am getting letters from Chief of Police and Detective Departments." What these men say is just an indication of what motorists everywhere are saying. No wonder our agents are making money hand over fist, both spare time and full time.



installed by anyone in ten minutes or less. There is no cost for operation. No extra batteries to buy. An introductory offer now lets you examine the most spectacular invention since the radio first came in, on 5-day test. Profit possibilities as our agent are almost unlimited. Mail the coupon for 5-day offer and complete territory details. No obligation whatever, but do it now!

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NORTHWEST ELECTRIC CORP.

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Send Quick For 5-Day Test

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